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October 1992

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Contents

CONTRIBUTORS

COMMENT

William Phillips *William Barrett* **7**
Browbeating the Public **8**
Edith Kurzweil *Once Again Prague* **10**

SYMPOSIUM

The End of Politics? **14**

ARTICLES

Steven Marcus *George Orwell: Biography as Literature* **42**
Robert S. Wistrich *Jewish Intellectuals and Mass Politics in* Fin-de-Siècle *Vienna* **51**
Pearl K. Bell *Fiction Chronicle* **63**
Karen Wilkin *Matisse at MOMA* **78**
Dorothea Straus *Remembering Jerzy Kosinski* **138**
George Cureton *My Ghetto: A Backward Glance* **143**

FICTION

Sergei Dovlatov *Superfluous Man* **108**
Lydia Davis *Old Mother and the Grouch* **129**

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POETRY **90**

Amy Clampitt, Mark Strand, John Hollander, Donald Hall, Edward Hirsch, Glyn Maxwell, Martha Collins, Gail Mazur, Les Murray

BOOKS

Susan Dunn — *The Good Society* **150**
by Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton

Culture Wars. The Struggle to Define America
by James Davison Hunter

The Cynical Society. The Culture of Politics and the Politics of Culture in Everyday Life
by Jeffrey C. Goldfarb

Acts of Compassion. Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves
by Robert Wuthnow

"Contentless Consensus: The Political Discourse of a Segmented Society" by Richard Madsen
in *America at Century's End*
edited by Alan Wolfe

Elaine Hoffman Baruch — *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* **161**
by Marjorie Garber

Jerry Z. Muller — *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* **164**
by Jeffrey Herf

LETTERS **168**

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COMMENT

William Barrett, who died last September, was an associate editor of *Partisan Review* from 1946 to 1955. With great energy, he was quite active, almost compulsively involved in editorial matters. He wrote articles, reviews, and comments: perhaps the best-known were his explanations of existentialism, which had just been imported into this country, and his strong criticism of left-liberalism in a piece not reticently called "The Liberal Fifth Column."

Barrett was trained in philosophy, which he taught at New York University until his retirement. But he had what might be called a literary mind. Like most literary-minded students of philosophy, he was drawn more to Europe than to Britain and America. Steeped in the European metaphysical tradition, he did not care much for the English or American exercises in logic or epistemology. Barrett bypassed pragmatism and the analytic strain. Wittgenstein was not his dish. But he did not go in for rhetorical thinking; he was a strict methodologist.

As a person, he might best be described as a loner. Though on the surface he appeared to be an exuberant talker and gregarious in company, he led a solitary life, and many of his habits and haunts were mysterious. Physically and socially, he was quite awkward, as was his closest friend, Delmore Schwartz, and some people, like Mary McCarthy and Hannah Arendt, thought he lacked *savoir faire* – something on which they placed a very high value. (The *New York Times* obituary was wrong in saying he was close to Arendt, McCarthy, and Rahv.)

Politically, like most of the community of which he was a part, Barrett was a strong anti-Communist but far from a right-winger. The *Times* obituary also was wrong in saying that Barrett had been a Trotskyite. In later years, Barrett, like many of his contemporaries, became more conservative. But I am not sure whether he became a full-fledged neoconservative, as the *Times* obituary stated.

Barrett had several utopian dreams: one was to become a Jew, another to write a successful musical comedy. Of the latter, I couldn't convince him you had to have a talent for popular entertainment. Of the former, he said that as a boy he had seen an elderly Jewish man across the courtyard reading a book, something his own Irish parents never did. Since he couldn't break completely with his Irish roots, he said he would like to be circumcised at the Vatican in Rome. Like his friend, Delmore, William Barrett lived in his head. All that counted was in his head. And he thought – or pretended to think – that Jewish heads were better than Irish heads, but not better than his own.

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His relation to Delmore was ambivalent and also had an element of dreamy utopianism. He came to me one day to complain that he was having to do work on the magazine that should have been done by Delmore, who, unlike Will, was a compulsive non-worker. He apparently thought that as a friend I could help straighten things out. But I could neither reduce Barrett's capacity for work nor Schwartz's capacity for avoiding it.

When Barrett resigned, he thought it was time for him to move on to other things, though he continued to write frequently for the magazine. For us at *Partisan Review*, it was time to continue what we thought of as our chosen work, if not our mission.

Browbeating the Public Despite its many confusions and oversimplifications, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* by Joan S. Rubin could be useful in documenting several aspects of the subject. It does give in some detail – too much detail – the history of literary talk shows, book clubs, and the lives of a number of the dispensers of middlebrow culture. Thus we learn more than we need to know about the lives of Henry Seidel Canby, Alexander Woollcott, Carl Van Doren, John Erskine, and Will Durant, among others, as well as the history of the Book-of-the-Month Club. But because her book is marred by the substitution of facts for understanding – a staple of academic writing – and because Ms. Rubin fails to take a clear position, it is essentially a middlebrow history of middlebrow culture. Nevertheless, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* is worth considering precisely because its faults are typical of the homogenization of the culture fashionable today, especially in the academy.

The errors lie at the heart of Rubin's conception of the subject. To begin with, she counterposes middlebrowism to the "genteel tradition" as well as to the avant-garde and what she calls modernism. She gets her notion of the "genteel tradition" from Santayana, for whom it was a much more complicated phenonemon. Rubin does not understand that what has become known as the "genteel tradition" originally saw itself as a corrective, on the part mainly of clergymen and academics, to the vulgarities of a rapidly expanding frontier society, and was distinct from the work of serious writers and thinkers. She also applies the labels of modernism and avant-gardism loosely to all subsequent high-level writing. And she constantly uses the term "democratic culture" meaninglessly, as something vaguely desirable, and "elitism," equally meaninglessly, as something bad.

One of the main flaws of the book is its misunderstanding of Matthew Arnold, whom Rubin seems to regard as the ancestor of the

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Book-of-the-Month Club. She does not realize that Arnold was combatting philistinism among the educated, and that he was upholding the idea of tradition – the tradition of the best that has been thought and written, the tradition, that is, of the classics. He was not a promoter of middlebrow culture for the masses. Similarly, Rubin doesn't seem to understand that Emerson, whom she sometimes places within the "genteel tradition," at other times among the salesmen of self-improvement, was advocating the development of a native culture free of the dominance of England and adapted to the individualism of the equalitarian myths.

Perhaps Rubin's cardinal error is her confusion of the selling of books with the content of books, that is, of the selling of good books with the selling of bad ones. Thus she mixes up selling the classics with selling popular works. And she fails to distinguish the commercial merchandising of books in general with books and commentary that actuallly are middlebrow in content. As a result, she sidesteps the basic question attending middlebrow culture: the spread of kitsch under the rationalization of educating the people. This leads her to overestimate the effects of pure huckstering and to underestimate the growth of middlebrowism through the entire culture. Indeed, she ignores completely the takeover by popular culture of books, television, and the movies. After all, these constitute the culture, the values, and the ideas of most of the population. That the classics are also sold by the same methods as kitsch and popular entertainment is a complication Rubin does not face.

Rubin is so occupied with the gimmicks and the personalities involved in the sale of an inferior culture that she never goes into the origins of middlebrow culture which lie in the unique history of the country. Because of its late arrival and the constant breaking of new frontiers, America lacked the cultural aristocracies of Western Europe. To counter the rough-and-ready culture that grew up, there developed both the high-minded efforts at education and a substitute culture for mass consumption. The later efforts to systemize the distrubtion of this substitute culture and make it profitable, the methods by which various cultural entrepreneurs built it up, Rubin describes in much detail in her book. Some of the efforts at raising the level of taste and judgement emphasized the qualities of truth and character to be associated with high literature, which Rubin unknowingly attributes to the spirit of the "genteel tradition." However, she seems unaware that until the modern period the pursuit of truth had been attributed to the value of the classic literature. It is not clear whether the association of "truth" with "beauty" was simply an intellectual convention or a strategy for making literature appear less frivolous. In any case, it long antedated what Rubin calls the "genteel tradition."

In the end, Rubin straddles the issues raised by the influence and

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value of middlebrow culture. In fact, the last sentence of her book makes a bow to the virtues of middlebrow culture. Hence, despite some casual observations, the book never considers the full meaning and effect of middlebrowism on the culture of the country. Another flaw of the book, common to much academic writing of the politically correct variety, is Rubin's assumption that what she refers to as the literary canon is arrived at by elite academics, mostly going back to the so-called "genteel tradition." She seems unaware of what every writer and literary critic knows, and what T. S. Eliot concisely describes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that literary tradition is created and recreated by writers. An irony that escapes Rubin is the parallel between the practice of the middlebrow industry not to emphasize differences in the quality of books and the present view in some quarters that to make literary distinctions smacks of elitism. Many forces converge in culture. But there must be some special significance in the fact that middlebrow culture has come full circle in the culture of deconstruction, according to which there are only texts, not good and bad texts.

W. P.

Once Again Prague There are as many tourists but fewer backpackers than there were two years ago, and more of them are shepherded by guides who precede their flocks with raised umbrellas, flags in various shapes and colors, walking sticks they alternately lift in the air and lean upon. Speaking a heavily accented English or German, they hold forth on what visitors are too lazy or rushed to glean from their guidebooks. Minibuses and trains requisitioned from amusement parks convey visitors whose feet can't keep up with their curiosity. Clip-clopping amidst cars, *droshkas*, pulled by pairs of horses and driven by black-coated, mostly mustachioed men in top hats or by women in dramatic black capes, carry fat families in holiday garb who obviously are in town to celebrate a birthday or an anniversary.

Prague is bustling. Its hustling shopkeepers affect an odd manner of being laid-back while letting you know that they know how capitalism functions: try entering a gateway or a public restroom without paying the requisite entrance fee, and you're politely blocked. Prices are high for foreigners – although cheap by comparison with London, Brussels, or Vienna – and since most of them don't know Czech, they can't tell just how high. But anyone can see that the economy has improved. The new taxis are small but comfortable; gasoline is available; there are no more lines in front of stores; wares for tourists, mostly Czech crystal and china,

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are artfully displayed, ready to be ordered and shipped. Money-changing establishments abound, although credit-card purchases are preferred, in part because this may be financially advantageous, in part because it proves to the new capitalists that the Czechs are with it. In sum, Prague is rapidly becoming a Western city and is as hell-bent on showing off its enormous progress as it is on retaining its nineteenth-century charm, on displaying it and capitalizing on it – in the manner of Vienna.

The greatest attraction is Zidské Hrbitov, the Jewish cemetery which, according to one guide, was in use between the tenth or eleventh century and the nineteenth: gravestones are piled one atop another, serving specific families – who had to bury their dead within the space allotted them – for centuries. While a guide pointed to the ghetto wall and explained that the inhabitants of this ghetto always had been governed by strict sovereigns who could confiscate at will their property and impose exorbitant taxes, a middle-aged woman took notes. Her husband, however, was uneasy hearing that only under Joseph II, in the eighteenth century, had Jews been allowed to leave the ghetto during certain hours of the day and that to distinguish them from everyone else, they had to wear broad-brimmed hats and yellow badges. At another place, a guide indicated where Kafka's father's house had stood before the ghetto was torn down at the beginning of this century: "You see," she said, "it was set against the wall, so that when Kafka grew up he could observe what was going on in the ghetto and look outside it as well." Even though we all have read Kafka and much of Kafkaiana, it was astonishing to learn that much of K's walk through Prague in *The Trial*, for instance, was lifted straight out of his life.

It's become a cliché to recall that travel produces a time warp, that it propels us out of our own reality and deposits us in another one. However, it seems to me that the associations we make are speeded up when, in addition to moving from one place to another within a short time, we also change context. I had just attended a conference on the history of psychoanalysis in Brussels, where discussion of Freud's Jewishness and his alleged devotion to as well as his ambivalence about his religion had been as central as his early relation to Czechoslovakia. But none of the psychoanalytic historians, including myself, had fully focused on the fact that this ambivalence itself was the result of the European Enlightenment and that psychoanalysis was its inevitable end product; or that Jewish intellectuals not only were created by these conditions and by the ambivalence of their lives but that the scientific ethos of the Enlightenment was calling out for a theory of human ambivalence. Thus it may be beside the point whether or not psychoanalysis is or is not a "Jewish science": this question arose not only from the

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anti-Semites and from Freud's concerns but inevitably was embedded in his theory, in the society from which it sprung, and in the increasing ambivalences everyone had to deal with, and at which the Jews already were expert.

Kafka's genius expressed the ubiquitous modern ambivalence in his haunting novels, and Freud located it in the roots of the human psyche. We know that they were born in the same part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that Kafka was younger and died at an earlier age, and that they did not know each other. But I was not aware before I got to Brussels that Sándor Ferenczi, Freud's Hungarian disciple, practiced a form of automatic writing in an attempt to reach the unconscious that vaguely resembled Kafka's endeavors and that – though later and differently – a number of the Surrealists advocated. Nor did I realize that Ferenczi, unbeknownst to Freud, already had undergone a self-analysis in 1899 and was preoccupied with spiritism, unconscious thought, and conflicts and transfer of thought before he ever met Freud.

I am noting these disparate factors to remind us that Prague, Budapest, and Vienna were the hubs of enlightenment in the Kaiserreich, and that with the removal of the so-called Iron Curtain not only economic but also intellectual exchange once again has opened up. Sooner or later, it is expected not only to permeate but also to guide the soon-to-be realized European Economic Community. The foundation of this community, and particularly the integration of twelve currencies into a single European one, was on everyone's mind during my brief trip.

The French psychoanalysts arranged to change the conference program in order to get back to Paris in time to cast their votes on September 20th: they all expected to have their say on the referendum. Roundtable discussions, commentators on television, and the front pages of newspapers at first celebrated the fifty-one percent victory for integration and then focused on the negative consequences of the forty-nine percent of dissenters. Even though the *International Herald Tribune* emphasized the political stalemate in Paris and EC leaders vowed unity, I kept thinking of the fact that French voter turnout was over seventy percent and that every European citizen takes his government more seriously than we in America do, thus managing to elect more serious political leaders than we do – leaders who in turn cannot afford to spend too much time electioneering rather than governing.

I had been invited to Vienna because, among other things, some people wanted to hear about how we handle multiculturalism in America: Austria accepts and integrates many immigrants and thus has to deal with the problems of teaching them German and finding work for them. I was told by the superintendent of Vienna's school system that

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nearly everyone goes to public schools, that the parents of thirty-two percent of school children speak foreign languages, and that each class has up to twenty-two students, with one teacher and an apprentice teacher. The latter takes natives and newcomers out of the classroom if they need help, and the favorable student-teacher ratio allows for close contact. (The central bureaucracy is nearly non-existent.) As a result, almost every refugee child knows German within six months. In central Europe, to be multicultural means to learn to live with people of many nationalities, to become integrated. Not to do so, I was told over and over again, is to court the sort of disaster that has overtaken the former Yugoslavia and, to a less violent extent, Czechoslovakia. Because nationalism is dangerous, ways of diffusing conflicts, of living with less-than-ideal neighbors and tolerating them are on everyone's minds. Questions revolve not around diversity but focus on integration and on the means of dealing with nationalistic elements. And precisely because no one in Central Europe or Germany takes democracy for granted and most leaders and intellectuals insist on preserving and strengthening the democratic process, they are at odds about how to handle the nationalistic elements in their countries. They don't want to stand by while the slaughter proceeds nearby, but they are immobilized by fear of destroying the as yet fragile freedoms that must be nurtured, so that authoritarian habits will die for good.

E. K.

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The End of Politics? A Symposium

William Phillips: I don't know whether there are Republicans here; my guess is there are a few. I suspect that most of you are either Democrats or leaning in that direction. In any event, I think we all feel that one of the most distinctive features of this election campaign is the disaffection, the apathy, the bewilderment of the public. The debates have rekindled a certain amount of interest. But one senses that people have had their fill of politics as usual, though they are not sure of where to turn, given the limited possibilities. Many people say that the strong showing of Clinton is a sign that the negative mood of the voters is changing. I don't know, this may be true.

In any case, I'm going to throw out some questions. One question is – and this is what we propose to explore tonight – what are the causes for this unsettling situation? The major symptom is, of course, the entrance of Perot into the race. Perot is clearly an adventurer, but he does not fit the stereotype of the savior on horseback, the strong man, common in backward countries in times of extreme discontent and confusion. He is the shrewd businessman cast as adventurer. One of his assets is that since he has no political ties or history, he can ask questions that embarrass incumbents. But the question is whether he is a temporary phenomenon or whether he arises out of some basic and more permanent problems.

Similarly, the question arises as to whether the situation is marked by a dissatisfaction with the two main candidates, or whether the trouble lies deeper – in a dissatisfaction with the presidency and Congress, and with the entire political system. On the surface, it would seem that the dissatisfaction with Bush comes largely over the unfortunate state of the economy, from the fact that he has not offered any solution in general to our economic and other problems, and that he has given the impression of being weak and without any serious program. Also, the liberals and even some conservatives are turned off by the large presence of a far-right politician and anti-Semite like Buchanan. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction with Clinton is based on the feeling that he can't keep all his promises, that he will raise taxes, and that he hasn't shed the negative legacy of the Democratic Party, although he has been trying to do that. Also, some people are turned off by the presence of ultra-leftists among Clinton's advisors.

Another important question is to what extent the alienation and anger of the public is due to the recession and to what extent it is due

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to deeper economic and political factors. In short, does our current situation signal the end of traditional politics, or is it a reflection of the frustration people feel, because of the state of the economy and the limited choices offered to deal with our economic and political problems? Another question is whether the disaffection is purely an American phenomenon or whether it exists in Europe too. These are some of the questions in my mind. The speakers and all of you here undoubtedly will have different ones.

Our speakers tonight need no introduction. They are Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the noted historian and advisor to American presidents, and Eric Breindel, editor and columnist at *The New York Post*. Each speaker will give a short presentation, after which they will be offered the opportunity to comment on each other's remarks. Then we shall turn over the discussion to questions and comments from the floor. Eric Breindel will be our first speaker.

Eric Breindel: Thank you for having me here tonight. I'm pleased by the notion that I need no introduction – I want to say that it is a real honor for me to share a panel with William Phillips. Earlier this evening, Joanna Rose and Edith Kurzweil reminded a few of us that William Phillips is the longest-serving editor of a major magazine in the Western world: It's a special thrill to share the podium with him, with Edith Kurzweil, and of course, with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. I hope that I am not here in a situation I often find myself in these days – that of a token reactionary.

I think William Phillips, in speaking to the notion of popular disaffection with politics, assumes that this is a real phenomenon that we all accept. Personally, I'm not sure how rampant disaffection actually is. I'm not sure that it wasn't unique to the first half of this year. It is certainly true that the American people didn't seem thrilled with their national election alternatives. Moreover, a combination of factors, including redistricting, the check scandal, and the term limits movement, will create a vast turnover in the House of Representatives. But disaffection from politics to me seems to convey a measure of non-participation, and I'm not sure if a general effort to change things, to change the Congress and to throw out the President of the United States – should that be the result – can be defined as disaffection. In fact, if we look at an index such as voter participation, which we obviously are going to find out about after election day, I'll wager that we won't see a low voter turnout. We haven't seen low voter turnouts – by our standards, not by European standards – this year in the primaries, and I think that participation suggests a degree of excitement and engagement.

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Let's accept for a moment the premise that, to some extent, people *are* disaffected. To what do we attribute this? Perot's entrance into the race was a response, in part, to dissatisfaction with the two-party system, with the national candidates who seemed to be emerging, and with the status quo. People have become persuaded more than ever before that, beyond the economic uncertainties of the moment, it is not within the ordinary individual's power to effect change. Politics is constantly said to be a playground for the well-connected, for so-called special interests, for the wealthy. People talk about lobbyists, about soft and hard money, about big contributors. There's more attention being paid than there has been in a long time to how campaigns are financed, all of which gives people the sense that they have a rather minimal role to play, by comparison to a handful of elite actors who enjoy genuine access and influence. Ross Perot speaks about lobbyists in alligator shoes. I'm not sure that people necessarily know exactly what he's talking about, or to whom he's alluding, but they know he's not talking about them. And they know he's suggesting to them that they are, in a sense, locked out of the system with respect to effecting change. Needless to say, you don't have to have a conspiratorial sensibility to be persuaded, in a circumstance like this, that our own potential influence will never be more than marginal. All of this, I think, helps explain Perot.

A second factor in disaffection is people's belief that there are genuine and valid issues that are taboo on the national level and in local elections. When this perception takes hold, it creates a sense that the discussion itself isn't all that meaningful. It is extraordinary that we are having a national election in 1992 without an open discussion of race as an issue. There are lots of indications that race is a central issue in American life. In the year of the riots in Los Angeles, in a year of debate over affirmative action and a so-called Civil Rights Bill, for this issue scarcely to have been touched on – in the course of the entire presidential campaign – seems to me quite striking. People aren't fools. They know when something is missing, and they know that if something is missing, there's a reason – no one wants to touch it. This, too, creates a measure of disaffection.

Certainly, the inequities of entitlement programs are an issue that Ross Perot raised frankly because there was a sense that the major party candidates couldn't or wouldn't touch it. Candidates who tried to do so in the Democratic primaries met with very little success. I think also that people hear a lot of discussion about things that they're not at all convinced matter much. Admiral Stockdale, who emerged – rather sadly to my mind, because I think he's an heroic figure – as a comic presence on the stage of the vice presidential debate the other night, made a wel-

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come point about the inordinate emphasis on environmental concerns. He spoke to what a lot of people feel – that there's an enormous level of exaggeration when environmental issues are discussed. I'm not sure that voters at large view these concerns as seriously as do some of the candidates. Let me offer another example of this tendency to fixate on false issues. Here in New York, we have a raging debate on the need for a civilian board to review complaints against the police force. If a Martian came to New York from outer space and watched the nightly news in New York, he'd be convinced that in our criminal justice system, one problem dwarfs all others: not violent crime; not rape; not murder; not assault; but police brutality animated by racism. I don't think that's a particularly realistic view, and when people see news coverage of this kind, it too creates a level of disaffection.

Finally, there is the general atmosphere of economic uncertainty, about which Mr. Phillips spoke. There is also, inevitably, uncertainty about America's proper post-Cold War international role. If the debate is guided by taboos, and if false issues inform the discussion, and if there is confusion about how to handle real issues, I think disaffection is probably an inevitability. Thus, Ross Perot. I believe, although I know others here may disagree with me, that Perot might have done exceedingly well this year. Not because he bears the seeds of a national third party, but because he embodies protest. He represents protest against economic uncertainty, against special interests, and against the mystification of issues. He doesn't believe, and he convinces people not to believe, that things are so complicated that they cannot be understood. The attraction of someone who appears to simplify issues is enormous, since I think some of our national politicians do not realize to what degree their discussions take on an "inside baseball" tone. I don't think, for example, that Vice-President Quayle realizes that when he starts talking about "pay or play" in relation to national health insurance, an enormous number of people have no idea what he means; there is no reason, moreover, why they should. Ross Perot suggests that ordinary people can grasp the nature of America's ills.

I am familiar with the argument that we dwell in a post-ideological age, that liberalism failed in the 1970s, that conservatism faltered in the 1980s, that Americans don't need a system of thought to deal with their political predicament. I suppose that some would argue further that Bill Clinton may be the first post-ideological candidate, uninformed by profound commitment either to the free market and deregulation on the one hand, and yet not animated by an allegiance to liberal-left ideology on the other. That may well be true. I think we'll learn more as time passes. But some ideological quests are still vibrant and valid. The notion that this was the electoral "year of the woman" turns out to have been

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real. Whatever one thinks about the notion itself, the idea held its own: it will result in the election to Congress of an enormous number of women. Maybe Bill Clinton is a return to what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. has called the vital center. Maybe Clinton rejects falsely polarizing choices: after all, family values and individual responsibility needn't stand in opposition to ending social inequities. Certainly, Clinton has campaigned as a champion of centrism. How he will govern is another question.

At this point, let me stop. I really just wanted to throw out a few thoughts. We all will learn a lot more from Mr. Schlesinger, and from listening to things that you yourselves have to say.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: As Eric Breindel suggested, one measure of political alienation might well be the decline in voter turnout. We all know that in recent elections, hardly more than fifty percent of eligible voters have voted, which means that the person elected as our next president could conceivably be chosen by twenty-six percent of the eligible electorate. Clearly, this is a rather new situation. In the election of 1988, about fifty percent of eligible voters turned out. In the election of 1888, almost eighty percent of eligible voters turned out. It is interesting to wonder why there has been this striking decline. It cannot be because the candidates in 1888, Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, or the issues of 1888 were more compelling than the candidates or issues of 1988. Indeed, those were years in which the presidential candidates were of such mediocre quality that James Bryce, in his book *The American Commonwealth*, also published in 1888, included a chapter entitled, "Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents."

Why would eighty percent of the voters turn out in 1888 and barely fifty percent in 1988? I think one great difference between 1888 and 1988 is the decline of the political party as an agency of voter mobilization. In 1888, the party was a very effective political unit. People were born into their political parties as they were born into their churches. They would as soon think of switching from Republican to Democrat or vice versa as from Catholic to Baptist or vice versa. These were the days when you had great torch-lit party processions; when Bryce, coming to this country, talked about the "military discipline" of American political parties. And these were the classic days of party control of the political process. What has happened between 1888 and 1988 or 1992 to transform the parties from vital, effective, disciplined units controlling the political process, to the enfeebled, vague labels that they are today? I just read today in *The New York Times*, for example, that many candidates, among them Senator Dole, the Republican leader in the Senate now

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running for reelection in Kansas, do not specify to which party they belong. In general, people decreasingly identify themselves with a party. The party no longer has the hold on the electorate that it once had. While this is not the only factor in the decline of voter turnout, I think it is an important one.

What has happened to the political party? Well, it has lost one after another of its classical functions. One important function was patronage, but civil service reform has reduced the power of the party as a means of distributing jobs. Another function of the party was essentially welfare – turkeys on Thanksgiving, food baskets at Christmas. The rise of the welfare state and the New Deal effectively abolished that function of the party. Another function of the party was its great role in the process of assimilation and acculturation: along with the public school and the factory, it was the great agency that moved immigrants into American life. The decline of immigration, until recently, removed that function. So one after another, the classical functions that gave the party a role in the process disappeared.

But the most drastic change has come with the rise of the electronic age. Even after they lost these other functions – to the civil service, to the welfare state, and so on – the parties retained one important function: they were the great mediators between the voter and the politician. If the politician wanted to know what the sentiment was in a certain locality, he would consult the party leader. If the voter wanted to know how to vote, he would listen to the local party leader. But the entry into the electronic age, the spread of television and the computerized public opinion poll, have ended the mediatory role of the party. Today if a politician wants to know what the sentiment is in a local district, the last thing he would do would be to call the party leader. He takes a computerized poll. If a voter wants to know whom to vote for, he doesn't consult the local party leader. He turns on the television and makes his own judgment by what he sees on the tiny screen. So the party has been bypassed by the political process.

When I was young, there were still volunteers in campaigns. There were still bumper stickers and buttons. Professional politicians ran campaigns. Now the whole thing has been turned over to electronic specialists. They do not come out of the political process; they come out of the media. And television has in effect replaced the political party as an agency for voter mobilization. The only exception is that it lacks the organizing ability of the party, at which it is much less effective. The electronic age – and this is to address William's question of whether this is an international phenomenon – is an international development. Everywhere around the world, parties are being enfeebled by the fact that television and the computerized public opinion poll have taken over

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their functions.

Is there anything left for the party to do? I mentioned James Bryce's book, *The American Commonwealth*: I like the way Bryce formulated the problem. He wrote, "In a country so full of change and movement as America, new questions are always coming up, and must be answered. New troubles surround a government, and a way must be found to escape from them; new diseases attack the nation and have to be cured. The duty of a great party is to find answers and remedies." We often wonder what politics are about. People sometimes think politics is a contest for power. Certainly it is that. In modern times, it is said to be a struggle over image, and I suppose that plays a role too. But in the end, politics can justify itself only in the pursuit of remedy, that is, finding answers to questions. This is the one way in which a president can revitalize a party.

Although I am certainly in favor of voter registration efforts, better voter turnout alone will not revitalize the parties. Voter turnout declines as the voter pool enlarges. The first decline in voter turnout came with the Nineteenth Amendment, with women's suffrage, in 1920. Women were not used to voting, and so turnout fell. The passage in 1965 of the Voting Rights Act, enfranchising for all practical purposes the black vote in the South, caused another decline in the percentage of turnout, because blacks, like women before them, were not "socialized," as the sociologists say, into the habit of voting. The passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment enfranchising eighteen-year-olds caused a further decline in voter turnout. Even today, though women and blacks are beginning to vote, the eighteen-year-olds are not. Every enlargement of the pool of eligible voters has reduced the percentage of voters turning out for elections.

I do not think that changing registration practices is going to affect these deeper problems. What might affect these deeper problems, though, would be to have presidents come up with serious answers to the problems that assail the country. Politics is in the end less about power and image than it is about remedy. It seems that one reason for voter alienation is that voters do not think politicians are addressing issues that concern them. In the most recent debate, when President Bush tried to bring up the so-called character issue, the audience of average voters wouldn't have anything to do with it. They didn't want to hear Bush making dark hints about Clinton going to Moscow when he was a student at Oxford. They wanted to know what the candidates were going to do about the problems we have today.

I am rather hopeful that these things will change. I inherit from my father a cyclical view of American politics. There has been a clear pattern

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of alteration in our politics between periods when private action, private interests, private enterprise seem the best way of meeting our problems, and periods when public action, public purpose seem the best way. The Reagan 1980s was of course a classical phase of faith in private action, and rejection of public action. It was a more drastic reenactment of the Eisenhower 1950s, a period which was itself a reenactment of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover 1920s. Similarly, at thirty-year intervals, we turn to public action, public purpose, public interest.Theodore Roosevelt ushering in the Progressive era in 1901; thirty years after that, Franklin Roosevelt ushering in the New Deal in 1933; thirty years after that, John Kennedy and the New Frontier in 1961. So if the rhythm holds, the 1990s should be more like the Roosevelt and Kennedy eras than like the Reagan era.

There is no mystery about the thirty-year interval. It is roughly the span of a generation. People tend to be influenced by the ideas that predominate when they come of age politically. People who grew up during the Progressive era, like Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harry Truman, carried forward thirty years later, when their generation's turn came, the ideas of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson into the New Deal. Similarly, people who grew up in the 1930s, like John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, and Robert Kennedy, carried forward the New Deal thirty years later into the New Society and the New Frontier. Kennedy touched and formed a political generation; and in the sense that the Kennedys and Johnson were the children of FDR, so Clinton and Gore are the children of Kennedy. And, as I say, if that rhythm holds, then that political generation's time should come in the 1990s. The kind of problems we confront as the result of more than a decade of public neglect can be met only by affirmative government. It may be that if a government begins to address itself to the serious problems concerning the American people, this question of alienation will not seem so formidable.

I will conclude by recalling what Woodrow Wilson wrote in 1889 in *The Political Science Quarterly* at Columbia University, reviewing Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, Wilson wrote, "America is now sauntering through her resources and through the mazes of her politics with easy nonchalance; but presently there will come a time when she will be surprised to find herself grown old . . . a country crowded, strained, perplexed . . . when she will be obliged . . . to pull herself together, adopt a new regimen of life, husband her resources, concentrate her strength, steady her methods, sober her views, restrict her vagaries, trust her best, not her average members. That will be the time of change."

When we look at America's position in the world today, I think

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that time is now upon us. Thank you.

William Phillips: Thank you both. We will turn the discussion over to the audience, and may I remind you that before the panelists began, we agreed to confine our discussion to the basic issues and not to address the particular merits or demerits of each candidate. Edith Kurzweil will now moderate. Is there a comment from the audience to begin our discussion?

David Sidorsky: I should like to connect Mr. Schelsinger's theme of the changes in the role of the media in the political process with Mr. Breindel's reference to the inclusions and exclusions of the political discussion during the electoral campaign. To a significant degree, the media have asserted their ability to "set the agenda" of American political debate. Any body that functions as the instrument of the perception of reality has power in shaping or focusing the objects that will enter into the field of perception. This seems to me to be ubiquitously evident in news reporting. Our culture's major media of perception and interpretation of the news – that is, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the three television networks, and *Time* and *Newsweek* as the recognized group of nonconspiring and noncolluding prestige media – share in the power to select, among the myriad happenings throughout the world, those which are to receive the status of events, while others are relegated below the threshold of perception. In terms of two competing philosophical approaches, it marks a recognition of the power of the subjective thesis of Bishop Berkeley, that "to be is to be perceived," against the realism of Bishop Butler that "each thing is what it is and not another thing."

One of the crucial tests of this thesis would be found in explaining the virtual exclusion of foreign policy issues from this year's presidential campaigns. Despite the demise of the Soviet Union, there is no doubt that the American role in world affairs is still important, with decisive consequences for domestic policy. Certainly there are issues that distinguish the two parties in the conduct of foreign policy. Yet at no time during the presidential campaigns has the issue of foreign policy emerged on the agenda of political debate or national concern. There are alternative ways of explaining this extraordinary exclusion which do not require that we conclude the media has set the agenda. For example, the Democratic Party pursued its appropriate strategy of minimizing discussion of foreign policy questions, while the Republican Party campaign showed itself inept in generating public discussion of these questions. Further, the American people, characteristically, have never had a great

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interest in foreign policy. International affairs gain their attention only when catastrophes abroad are reported or by the reluctant realization that a foreign crisis requires unavoidable American involvement.

Yet for the past fifty years, it has been accepted that the mass media has a public responsibility to provide forums for foreign policy discussions to take place during campaigns, whatever the level of public awareness or popular concern. This year, the difference reflects, in part, a media decision not to provide amplification or resonance for the discussion of foreign policy issues. Instead, the recurrent effort to introduce these issues into news forums were greeted by a media echo chamber, with the reverberating message that these issues were distractions raised to interfere with the overwhelming concern of the American people about the sad state of the economy.

However, the campaign discussion of economic policy also provides support for the claim that the media does play a role in setting the agenda. It rests upon the discrepancy between the realities of the economic situation, from the point of view of an impartial spectator, and the perception of that situation as projected in the major media. Simply put, the picture of the economy that emerged from media coverage was that the American economy was a "disaster area." Just as it may represent bias to stress only the favorable figures, so it may be construed as bias to place most of the focus on the negative numbers. The pervasiveness of this negative domestic economic portrait has fixed the public agenda. This "agenda-setting" claim has meant that any political campaign attempt to shift the focus back to the good news side of the ledger has opened the way for an image of the presidency as insulated from or not caring about the victims of hard times.

This, in turn, raises the further question of how the Republican presidency has become vulnerable to such charges. It goes beyond the reasonably narrow question of media agenda-setting during a political campaign to the broader issue of how the images and characterizations of historical decades are set. If the media provide a species of instant history, then their influence on fixing or keeping the historical record is considerable. Subject to future historical revisions, it is within their power to decide whether, for example, the sixties are to be seen as a decade of legitimate protest and effective compassion or of irresponsible and counterproductive unrealism, or that the eighties were a decade of greed rather than of sustainable growth.

Whatever the response to these questions, raising them reflects in some degree Arthur Schlesinger's thesis of the changes in the power of the media compared to the political party in recent American history. An interesting hypothesis on this change is that the critical turning point was Watergate. The events of Watergate together can be seen as an ex-

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tra-constitutional transfer of power from the presidency to a *de facto* alliance between the Congress and the media. Congressional action, whether in the Senate Committee's hearings directed against the Nixon administration, ironically like Senator McCarthy's committee hearings against the Truman administration, can provide only a legislative forum for criticism of executive authority. Yet the media provide the resonance for that criticism and are able to sustain the confrontation in the public's mind. Mostly inadvertently during the early phases of Senator McCarthy's activities, and with much greater zeal and dedication during Watergate, the media sustained the stories that led to presidential popularity loss, withdrawal, or resignation.

Since Watergate, it seems evident that there has been a widespread political recognition of the reality of media power. This is taken for granted in the realization that one of the challenging tasks of presidential leadership is to gain the ability to set a political agenda. Since I exclude the hypotheses of media monolith or conspiracy, it is important to suggest why this account of the media's role in agenda-setting can be explained. First, the various news media, particularly television or non-print media, need to transpose the complex events of a reality derived from the world village into a simpler, dramatic, and understandable, interpreted version. Second, within the groups that now make up the communciations and information industry there are strong tendencies toward political liberalism, which emerge in different ways in the media perception of reality. Although the agenda-setting role of the media is not explicit and transparent within the political campaign, in many ways it is tacitly recognized and taken for granted.

Much of the praise for former President Reagan as a communicator assumed that the task of the presidency was to be able to set the agenda by getting through to the people without the president's views being filtered through the media. Reagan's success at this task may have obscured the degree to which the power of shaping the agenda had actually been transferred from the ordinary exercise of presidential authority to the media, and this may be reflected in the current difficulties of President Bush. A Democratic presidency may result in both a less adversarial media and the end of congressional committees as confrontational investigative forums. So the victory of the "media's candidate" would mark a reversion in the balance of power between the presidency and the media

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Would you like to answer?

Eric Breindel: I think Professor Sidorsky makes a very compelling

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point. There are a lot of people who wonder whether the climate of uncertainty – and it's almost a climate of fear that one perceives as a result of watching the national news with respect to the national economy – is indeed appropriate to real economic circumstances. How bad things actually are is open to debate. There are people in the Clinton camp, for example, who right now will tell you that they see things moving upward; that they see things getting better; that traditional economic indices suggest that we are not so ravaged economically as most Americans seem to believe. But these people admit that there is no particular reason to acknowledge this reality in advance of Election Day. Do people reflect on their own personal experience when they conclude that things are going badly? Or does the media contribute to this sensibility? I think it has to be that the media contributes. You know, we talk about, for example, how television actually works and how news stories are shown. One recent illustration is the discussion of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which one of the candidates in particular was afraid to acknowledge he had supported, for a long time, because – in his perception – it spoke to the issue of job flight. It meant the closing of plants here and the flight of American jobs abroad. And I think that this response was a direct function of the fact that the only visual image that national television can come up with to illustrate a subject as complex as the North American Free Trade Agreement is a closed plant. That is an actual image; that is what you will see on the nightly news. The result is a media-driven interpretation of major national events. And I suspect that media-driven interpretations inform the general climate.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr: I would offer some qualifications. In the first place, the media are not monolithic. (Here I resist the notion of regarding "media" as a subject commanding a singular verb.) It may well be that we do not have the intensely partisan press that we had in the nineteenth century, but the idea that the media operate in conspiratorial unity is obviously quite wrong. You see plenty of press and television on different sides of the questions. Nor do I think that so far as agenda-setting is concerned, the media are more powerful than the president of the United States.

For instance, during the whole period of the 1980s, the agenda was set, and very foolishly set, in my view, by Reagan. We now recognize some of the consequences of Reagan's agenda-setting. Probably the most disastrous law that's been passed since World War II was the tax cut of 1981, which, combined with the increase in the defense budget, resulted in tripling the national debt and the succession of deficits. The whole assumption behind this act was that tax cuts would pay for themselves, which we know is not true. But Reagan set the agenda, and the media

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ate out of his hand.

So I'm not worried really about the media setting the agenda, because the media is heterogeneous; and even more important, the president of the country, if he has any leadership qualities, is going to set the agenda for the country. I might remind you of how Henry Adams described the president of the United States. He said the president resembles the commander of a ship at sea: "he must have a helm to grasp, a course to steer, and a port to seek." The Constitution gives every president a helm to grasp, but if a president has a course to steer, and a port to seek, as Reagan did (although it seems to me it was a reckless course, nonetheless he had one), he is going to set the agenda. With a president like Carter or Bush, who had no course to steer or port to seek, you have a different situation.

Eric Breindel: I would just like to add, on an informational note, that the media, in plural, were highly aware of and strongly resented the degree to which they were controlled by Reagan and his handlers and the experts in the White House. The media were very aware of what they perceived as failures in the coverage of the 1988 campaign. What went on right after the campaign was that the people who covered these campaigns reached a collective decision not to allow campaigns to be controlled again in the same way the GOP had controlled the campaigns of the 1980s. Thus, the advent of the truth squads that we now see. At the end of each of this season's national debates, one of the television commentators has gone on the air to say, "If you watch our news show tomorrow morning, the accuracy of the points that have been in made in this debate will be assessed by so-and-so," implying that someone is going to stay up all night and check up on everything that each of the candidates said. Beyond that, *The New York Times* is running a campaign feature on an almost four-times-a-week basis, showing the advertisements that are available on television, giving you the texts, and then analyzing them for truthfulness. There is an active effort on the part of the media – in plural – and particularly the prestige media, to combat the ability of the people who run political campaigns to be as successful as they have in the past in controlling the agenda or if you will, setting the agenda. I think it's well worth noting.

Fred Siegel: I would like to make a few points. First, I think Arthur Schlesinger's discussion was a little bit incomplete. The most important function the parties lost was their ability to control nominations. The difference in American and European parties (and in Europe the parties are in trouble too; I think the French Socialists are running at twenty-

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one percent in the polls now) is that those parties still haven't lost their ability to control their own choice of candidates. We have, and that's a fundamental difference.

Another thing that I would like to add concerns the question of the parties' function of problem-solving. One of the reasons why the parties are now weak in problem-solving is because the courts, for better or worse and more often for worse, have taken over the question of problem-solving. This means, for instance, that on the streets of New York, begging is legal even if it's aggressive and invasive to others, because a federal judge says so. A federal judge says so, because an interest group went to the judge and said, "Give us some help."

On the media: here I have to agree largely with Eric, although not entirely. Anyone living for these last few years in New York has to be struck by how it was possible in the course of two years to lose three hundred and seventy-two thousand jobs, effectively fifteen percent of the private sector, and not have that fact covered by *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* in fact has stopped publishing the monthly features on unemployment that it used to run. We just had a senatorial campaign in which, although one of the candidates, Comptroller Elizabeth Holtzman, had these unemployment figures and knew what the story was, she was afraid to use them. Instead, it became a race to see who could claim to have been more victimized.

Now I come to the point on which I disagree with Eric, when he says that the media is distorting the current economic situation. Part of the problem is that Bush has never come to grips with the structural changes affecting the economy, the loss of manufacturing dominance, the effect of international trade. I think people have a sense that Bush is simply not concerned with these things. A friend of mine who has reason to know pointed out to me that in four years Bush never asked a single question at the Council of Economic Advisors meetings. He just wasn't interested. He thought it would take care of itself. And we saw in that debate last night that Bush had nothing to say on the economy. It was functionally a TKO. One other point, Eric. I think you're wrong about the Clinton people not having a sense of how bad it is. Today's *Los Angeles Times* picks up what I've been hearing informally, that the Clinton people are very well aware of the prospective bank failures in California, come December. And they are very well aware of the fact that they may need a stimulus package right away, even if that undercuts fighting the deficit.

Following up on the question of political cycles – and here I must say that I have been under Professor Schlesinger's spell since I was an undergraduate – these cycles have always been in my mind. But I wonder

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whether this time the rhythm of the cycles will conform to history. It may. Professor Schlesinger has been right in the past, and he may be right in the future. But I'm skeptical, and here's why. When I look at the ads Bill Clinton is running, I see that he's not running on the basis of John Kennedy or the Great Society; he's running away from all that. The main ad that is running now begins by saying that welfare should be a hand up rather than a handout. He's running away from all those programs. The next shot in the ad is of him supporting the death penalty. The third shot, depending on which ad he runs, shows him with policemen. This is not building on traditional Democratic Party themes. Nor is it building on traditional Democratic Party constituencies. The unions have not been a major part of the Democratic constituency, as they were in the thirties; nor are the racial minorities the core of its constituency, as they were in the sixties. This is going to be the first fully suburban presidency. You can argue that Reagan was partially a suburban president, but the next one will be the first completely suburban presidency. One of the marks of Clinton's shrewdness, as *The Wall Street Journal* has noted, as well as a number of black friends have pointed out to me, is that when Clinton appears before suburban black audiences, he gives exactly the same speech that he gives before suburban white audiences, about job growth and so on. He does not strike narrowly racial themes.

To the point about entrepreneurship: The entrepreneurial quality of politics today, the inability of Congress to cooperate in the most basic matters, suggest that the real divisions ahead are not those between Bush and Clinton, which in many ways are exaggerated. If you look at what Bush is supposed to believe if he listens to what his smarter handlers tell him, and at what Clinton says he believes, you see there is not a great deal of difference. Clinton gave up on "pay or play" health care; he has gone to a kind of market-oriented health care reform. On school choice, there are differences, but they are both in favor of choice – this was inconceivable four years ago. I think the real difference is between Clinton and the barons of the Democratic Party in Congress. That is where the fight is going to occur. And if Clinton is not to end up losing, and I hope for the sake of the country he isn't, then that is where the real differences are going to show up. The difference will be between Clinton and the traditional Democratic Party in Congress which never met a bureaucracy it didn't like.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I agree with much of what Fred Siegel has said, though I would disagree on the line or direction that a Clinton administration is likely to take. The real difference between the two parties, at least since 1912, when the Republicans expelled Theodore

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Roosevelt, is that the Republican Party has been the party of business and the Democratic Party has been the party of government. The Republican Party thinks that if you give all power to business, it will solve all the problems of the country. And the Democratic Party believes that you have to assign a role to government in order to protect the public interest against the greed and depredations of business.

In that sense, Bill Clinton believes in government, unlike Jimmy Carter, who did not believe in goverment. Jimmy Carter was the most conservative Democratic president since Grover Cleveland. He sounded rather like Reagan. Clinton seems to me to be very much in the Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy tradition. We must remember that Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson all seemed more conservative when they were running for president than they turned out to be after they were elected.

Fred Siegel: Traditional liberalism developed in opposition to the overwhelming power of manufacturing corporations. I'm not sure of the relevance of that tradition to the New World, where for the first time in our history we have more people employed in manufacturing than government.

Harry Kahn: I'd like to return to the question of the decline of politics, and I wonder whether the problem isn't a combination of the media and the phenomenon of opinion polls. Here we are today, with a new poll every week. People listen through the media and learn what the score is. You're getting an assumption that the polls are always right. There was a time, I think, twenty years ago or more, when people were skeptical about polls. Now polls seem to be completely accepted. Since they are accepted, people say, "Well, since we know what the score is going to be, why bother to vote?" I think that the very fact that we have this combination of the polls, with their presumed accuracy, and the media, makes for a spectator interest but not a participatory interest. I'm not sure what we're going to do to change this; it should be changed, but I think it's a big problem.

Eric Breindel: That is a very interesting point. It is, after all, improper in New York State for a candidate to release part of a poll; he has to release the entirety of the poll. That's for the specific purpose of not being able to secure partisan advantage by releasing incomplete figures. On Election Day, there is at least a convention that results aren't reported until everyone has voted; there is an effort to allow people on the West Coast to cast their ballots without feeling that the election is already over. Yet excluding exceptional cases, the polling today is so ex-

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tensive and accurate that it is not unfair for people to assume they do know the score from polls. So we do have a very real problem with what to do with information that does exist and is in the hands of some people. I'm not sure that I see a solution. But I think you've raised a very real issue.

Marty Lipset in *The New York Times* about a month ago wondered whether or not there weren't polling situations in which people gave inaccurate information about their voting plans, particularly this year. I think some people are probably embarrassed to acknowledge, for example, that they may vote for President Bush. President Bush is widely perceived as unlikely to be successful, and as a less-than-triumphant president in many respects. As a consequence, it is very possible, under the circumstances, that the real margin between candidates is less wide than it appears to be. Again, I think you speak to a real problem, but I don't see an answer.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr: I have always had a basic skepticism about polls. I do not believe that you can call up six hundred and thirty-two people and get an accurate representation of what two hundred and fifty million people feel. We all know the volatility of polls, particularly in an election such as this one, when none of the candidates is personally very popular, and when therefore there are a large number of undecided people who could shift the vote one way or another. So I think that the best hope for preventing polls from dominating is the kind of natural skepticism that Harry Kahn expressed, and which people are increasingly likely to express. Pollsare like taking your temperature; they tell what your temperature is at the moment, but they can't predict what it is going to be tomorrow.

Heather Macdonald: This is a question for Professor Schlesinger. You persuasively describe the correlation between the decline of the party and the decline of voter participation in politics. But I'm not certain what specific feature of the party you single out as the causal factor. Is it the party as an organization that can put pressure on people to actually get out and vote, or is it the party as a source of ideology? You characterized the Republicans as the party of business and the Democrats as the party of government, suggesting that when those ideas fractured, people had less of a connection to a set of ideas to get involved with. Or is it simply that we need a mediating organization to belong to, to affiliate ourselves with, in order to increase our participation in politics?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I suppose it is both those things. I would put

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it in terms of loyalty to parties. People used to feel a great loyalty to their political party, whether because the party was something they were ideologically comfortable with, or because the party was a social organism in which their friends were involved, which did things for them, or because the leadership of that party was something they felt sympathetic to. Nonetheless, for whatever reason, they felt party loyalty. You voted the straight party ticket; people running for office advertised their party. Party identification was very strong. Party loyalty has, for reasons we have been discussing, practically disappeared. Billboards, if you go through the country today, very rarely name the party under which a candidate is running. None of us feel loyal to the party any more; we all vote split tickets. The whole ethos of the party has radically changed. The disappearance of party loyalty means that the party is no longer effective in organizing the political process.

Edith Kurzweil: Aren't you also saying that the parties served as community?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: Well, they served as a sort of community, not in the sense that the Communist Party was a community; our parties have been far more disorganized and heterogeneous. But they played a role of meaning in people's lives; they no longer do. Only a bunch of old-timers, who can remember the New Deal, for instance, have much feeling for a party as such. Today, polls show, I believe, that more young people identify themselves as independents than as Republicans; and almost as many identify themselves as independents as do those identifying themselves as Democrats. Independents are going to be very soon the largest party in the United States, which is the key to the decline of the parties.

Heather Macdonald: Are you suggesting that there can't be politics without parties, without that mediation?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: Well, of course we started out in this country without parties. The Founding Fathers, the people who drafted the Constitution, did not like the idea of parties. In his farewell address, George Washington warned against the baneful spirit of parties. Madison, in his *Tenth Federalist Paper*, talked about factionalism as a great danger to the Republic. But parties, although not mentioned in the Constitution, forced themselves on the polity for a number of reasons, partly because there are, as Madison conceded in the *Tenth Federalist*, a variety of interests in the country, requiring representation. It was also

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because, in a system based on separation of powers, the party was one means of bridging the separation and providing unified government.

So the party came to play a very vital role, and it still in some aspects retains a vital role. But the decay of the parties permits the Perot phenomenon. As parties no longer control the process, any Texas billionaire who sounds like Will Rogers and can afford to pay for a campaign is going to be able to enter the political process. I think the decline of the parties means a rise in personalist political movements; the George Wallace movement in 1968 was a preview of the Perot movement of 1992. Politics without parties is going to be much more unstable than politics with parties.

Stephen Koch: I am impressed and enlightened by this discussion, especially by Arthur Schlesinger's remarks. But is it really true that the Democratic Party is in such a state of disarray? Doesn't the Clinton candidacy represent a new unity? My feeling is that right now there are large numbers of people, people who have been uncertain and disaffected since the fragmentations of 1968, who are saying, "Here at last is a Democratic Party candidate who I really believe *ought* to win, and who is really *going* to win."

That's new. 1968 shattered the old Roosevelt coalition, permanently breaking its grip on Washington politics. The task of shaping a new unity has been troubled, and it has seen many failures. Professor Schlesinger says that Jimmy Carter was the most conservative Democratic president since Grover Cleveland. Perhaps – but many in Carter's cabinet and sub-cabinet were among the most left-wing senior officials in recent memory, and in fact his administraion was enfeebled in part by the many unintegrated divisions within the Democratic Party. Carter was elected as a centrist, but the Carter center did not hold. The Clinton center just might make it.

Eric Breindel notes the small role that race has played in this election. Yet only four years ago, with the Jesse Jackson campaign, race dominated the scene. Jackson assumed leadership of black politics in America partly to assert a new authority for blacks within the Party, partly to assemble a new coalition from the classic constituencies of the left. He got the new authority, and we'll surely hear more of it. But Jackson's electoral combination failed. Yet Clinton seems genuinely to be occupying the center, as any American president must. So isn't it possible that the Clinton candidacy represents not a continuing disintegration of the Democratic Party, but its new unity, its new face?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I would hope that this will be the case. I

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think it will largely depend on whether Clinton is elected, what he proposes to do, and the extent to which he will be able to hold the Party behind him. I don't suppose that what would please Ken Galbraith would necessarily please Ben Wattenberg, but I think Clinton has a great chance, and I think he is a professional, in the sense that FDR was, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson were. That is, he understands how to bring people together and get them working in the same territory. So I think that Clinton's success, not only in the election but also in the presidency, would do a great deal to revitalize the party system.

Eric Breindel: If I may comment; I think that Stephen Koch made an interesting point about the Carter administration. It's true indeed that when Carter campaigned for president, he was assailed by many for seeming to speak the language of the right, for seeming to represent the Democratic Party in its most conservative incarnation. Yet in terms of the political ideology with which we associate Carter, what we mean when we say that Clinton won't be Carter the Second is that there won't be a return to the left-wing governance.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I would say that Carter, like Bush, is a perfect example of the Henry Adams illustration of a case where there was no course to steer and no port to seek. Conservatives regarded Carter as a liberal, as you do; liberals regarded him as a conservative, as I do.

David Sidorsky: May I comment on the analogy of the successful presidential term to the properly charted voyage? Perhaps I understand the analogy too simplistically, but does not its application miss the historical lesson that Arthur Schlesinger, citing Reinhold Neibuhr, has often taught, about the irony of history? One of the many reasons for ironic results in history has been that setting the right course and implementing it does not imply that what has been accomplished will have been appropriately seen or judged. Along these lines, Joseph Conrad, in his novel, *Chance*, portrays a retired sea captain in London at the turn of the century, who discovers that "newspapermen (he seemed to think them a specially intellectual class) never by any chance gave a correct version of the simplest affair." Since Conrad's sea captain thinks of the press as being the "ship's log" of the British Isles, he believes that if the British Isles were afloat, they would certainly sink. Great Britain appears to Conrad's seaman as a society that believes itself sufficiently secure to freely indulge in error, "for they see that no matter what they do, this tight little island won't turn turtle on them or spring a leak and go to the bottom of the sea with their wives and children."

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This reference suggests that the widespread reporting of the Bush administration as a failure on the domestic or economic front could be a misreading of the record, as it would be perceived by an objective history. While it could be countered that part of governing is public relations, in the sense of controlling the perception of one's activities and policies. Yet the presidency, as has been previously suggested, may have lost the power to effectively control the reporting of its record.

The more general point, however, does not require acceptance of any thesis about the presidency and the media. That is, virtuous or even historically effective actions are not always recognized as such by the majority of the people, just as historic blunders may not necessarily diminish a public reputation. History has never been a morality play in which those who set the right course and steer by it do not run aground in unpredictable ways. So there are many historical precedents for the thesis that the Bush presidency has been a successful one, by reasonable criteria, deserving of reelection, which it will not achieve.

Indeed, if it is important for a Great Power to avoid major foreign policy errors rather than to initiate brilliant strategies – a box score with no errors whatever by the hit or run count – the Bush administration may well turn out to have been the *only* presidency since the 1920s which committed no error of historic proportions. I mean by that a reasonably avoidable error in policy whose severe consequences are felt for decades, of the kind that can be ascribed to Carter on the destabilization of the Shah, to Kennedy on the disastrous and unanticipated results of the coup against Diem, to Roosevelt on misunderstanding his Grand Alliance with Stalin, and in a clear way to every other postwar president.

Administrations, like persons, may often do the right thing, by moral and practical standards, and not get credit for it. They lose.

Quentin Anderson: I have just one thing to add. A discussion that fails to mention the prevalence of the idea that a cause amounts to a politics is a discussion that is incomplete. We see an awful lot of this since the sixties, and a cause that at once asks for a wrong to be rectified and also appears not to believe that there is anybody empowered to act is not a politics. Politics requires a forum in which to carry on a struggle. I am also puzzled by the Ross Perot thing. Isn't he trying to act alone as a wholesale mediator between the public and the national interest? That too would be an end of politics.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I'm not sure Ross Perot could answer that question.

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Peter Shaw: When I began reading *Partisan Review* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I imbibed the sense that it was better not to be interested in electoral politics than to be interested in them. I formed myself on that notion, to my own detriment, for a number of years, and then returned, to some extent, to a general interest in electoral politics. I find myself looking back at those years with some nostalgia, when I hear William Phillips's introduction, in which the problem is assumed to be that there is not enough interest in electoral politics. I think that in the *Partisan Review* tradition, it would be right to take a look at this falling-off as possibly a healthy development. I think that two powerful points have been made tonight, which have to be taken into account: Eric Breindel's point that disaffection from the political process arises because there are questions that are taboo; and then Fred Siegel's point that there are questions that have been removed from the political process because the courts have taken over a number of pressing issues. I would think that if those two things were not true, then there might be a great deal more interest in electoral politics at this time.

However, setting that aside, although taking it into account, there have been two developments in the last twenty-five years that I think account for the falling off in voter interest – something not necessarily measured by voter participation. (I think Eric is right that voter turnout has proved to be higher than one might expect.) One development is the intrusion upon private life of political and indeed of politicized cultural concerns that the sixties brought. Virtually everyone in the country was caught up in politics willy-nilly. This became a major part of experience in a way that it had not been before. The second development was something that was ongoing from before the sixties, namely the Cold War – another thing that intruded itself upon everyone's sensibility and made everyone necessarily political and concerned about politics. Now that the cultural issues that once so obtruded themselves have been removed as an arena for effective participation by individual voters, in the way that Eric and Fred described, and now that the Cold War is over, the electorate has a right to look again to the private life as something more important than politics. The electorate indeed has a right to look at this election as an election in which one is not obliged to ask oneself the question, "Which of those candidates would I trust with the red telephone?" or "Which of those candidates do I think would fundamentally advance or interfere with the most important cultural and social concerns that I have?" The latter is not possible because these matters have been effectively removed from the public arena, for the time being; and the former is not possible, because of this great change in history,

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the end of the Cold War.

William Phillips: Since my past is being invoked, I would like to make a very brief comment. I think that I was probably more correct years ago in staying away from electoral politics, although at the time I thought I understood what was going on in the world. I had a global view and was not bothered by immediate matters. Now I'm more confused than I was then.

Marion Oliner: If I understood the gist of the discussion tonight, I was struck by the fact that Ross Perot is somehow supposedly symbolizing something new and unexpected. Perhaps I am wrong, because I am not as well-informed as some of you, but I have the sense that Ross Perot is part of an ancient tradition of the maverick who comes and simplifies issues, has solutions to complex problems, is pure, as against the compromised politician, and prides himself on having no machine affiliation. All these things, it seems to me, made Reagan quite attractive, and to the country's detriment, too, inasmuch as he kept himself so aloof from what was going on. So I wonder whether Perot, like so many before him, doesn't appeal to an everlasting romantic need for a hero? On the other hand, we are busier than ever destroying the images of the leaders we have had.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: It's quite true that throughout American history, third parties have arisen to bring forward issues which have been ignored by the major parties, or to express voters' sense of outrage or estrangement from the political process. But the distinguishing feature, it seems to me, about Perot is that he doesn't have a party. In 1948, the Dixiecrats produced a party and a candidate, Strom Thurmond. The Progressives had a party. Even George Wallace had a sort of party. Ross Perot has no party at all. He doesn't need a party. All he does is buy television time. I think in that sense he is a portent of a rather depressing future.

Eric Breindel: There is a separate, distinguishing feature. As some of us agreed earlier, if Ross Perot had remained in the race, he might well have won. At the time, three or four weeks before he withdrew, he was running virtually even with the two major party candidates. That is success of a sort, unlike anything any other third party candidates have achieved. After all, Henry Wallace was not a potential president of the United States. The debate in 1948 was whether Henry Wallace would get five million votes, and it turned out that he got about a million votes. Strom Thurmond as a Dixiecrat was a protest candidate; George

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Wallace was a protest candidate. None of these people were about to be elected president. Ross Perot was a very real possibility in this respect, and as such he has to be regarded in and as himself as an altogether different phenomenon.

Harold Ehrlich: Despite sometimes being a professor, I would like to break with tradition. Instead of making a speech, may I ask a question? Since we have two distinguished political analysts here, and both seem to agree that the parties' importance has diminished greatly, why is it that George Bush, who in the past has seemed a rather moderate person in many ways, who was sort of balanced whether you agreed with his point of view or not, in this campaign allowed the extreme right wing of his party – when they had no place to go – to play such a big role, even though he didn't have to do so?

Eric Breindel: The degree to which Bush has been over-responsive to the demands of what is called the far right in the Republican Party is going to be, I suspect, one of the great post-election debates in GOP circles, over the next four years, should Bush lose. There are already people advancing the notion that the great errors of the campaign – the formal campaign – started with the national convention: allowing the Buchanan speech to set the tone the first night is said to have been divisive and unnecessary. The perception at the time, for what it's worth, among the why-did-he-have-to-do-it crowd, is that it was believed to be a very real possibility that the radical right, or the hard right, in the Republican Party, would bolt. Bolt where? Bolt in the sense of staying home. There was a Buchanan candidacy. Bush had been challenged from the right. There was a strong sense that Reagan had become president in part by managing to put together a coalition that included the "religious right." If these people didn't participate and provide the cadres that they had provided for Reagan, it was thought that you had a much weaker candidacy.

Bush was responsive. We take as a given, an assumption, that Bush's alliance is an unwilling one: I suspect that, on certain levels, it is. Yet I also suspect that we're probably exaggerating the degree to which he is uncomfortable with the right. I'm not altogether persuaded that Bush has been insincere in recent weeks: he takes very seriously this notion that he's raising important issues about Bill Clinton. The assumption that he doesn't believe in the rhetoric and merely says what he is compelled to say is, I think, untrue. I suspect that Bush feels very strongly about the way Bill Clinton conducted himself in 1969, even though the issue doesn't resonate now; it's a generational proposition. It doesn't mean that Bush is insincere in that respect. But you point to an issue that people

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interested in the Republican nomination in 1996 and people interested in revitalizing the Republican Party are going to be looking at very closely.

Estelle Leontief: I would like to ask Professor Schlesinger if it isn't true that before his election, Roosevelt's speeches were different from the speeches he gave after he was elected, in which there was much more form; they were much more revolutionary, much more creative. And isn't it likely that such a thing would happen with Clinton, and that the role he's playing now is a political role which he has to play and which Roosevelt in his time had to play?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: Roosevelt, it must be remembered, had the particular advantage, in one sense, to come into office at a time when twenty-five percent of the labor force was out of work, when the gross domestic product was cut in half, and there was a felt, perceived, real condition of national crisis, which gave him a much wider range of options than we have today. Today people feel we are in a recession; we are indeed in a recession, but actually our unemployment rate is less than eight percent. The British unemployment rate is over ten percent. One reason why there is so much attention paid to our recession – Eric raised this earlier – is that this is a recession that affects the middle class more particularly than at other times in history. If unemployment were just a working-class problem, there wouldn't be this concern in the press and in politics. But because so many junior executives are suddenly faced with finding jobs, and because so many people even in the media are themselves losing jobs, naturally much more attention is being paid.
I do think that a crisis permits a wider range of action. I don't think that Clinton therefore will have the opportunities that Roosevelt had. Moreover, Ronald Reagan succeeded in doing what no previous post-New Deal Republican president had done, and that is to figure out a way to block further social spending. He did it by contriving a deficit so large that there wouldn't be money available for social spending, and that is another thing that is going to restrict what Clinton would like to do.

Cynthia Colin: I'd like to go back to the question of the American character, of our images of ourselves, and how it may be affecting our political capacity in an era in which finally the American people may realize they are not the leaders of the hegemony of the world; whether that will force us into a personal isolationism as well as possibly a political national isolationism; whether we are seeing those forces at play, for example, with the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] talks and the reaction to them.

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Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: What effect will the end of the Cold War have on the American character? I don't think America is naturally an imperial power, unlike Britain and France, countries that sent their people to the far corners of the world where they lived and created new societies. We have never really been a colonizing power. Americans never even went to countries like the Philippines and Puerto Ricoin the way that the British went to Kenya, or the French to Algeria. We prefer America. We do not have the colonizing instinct, and therefore such as we had in the way of empire was never anything like the classical empires. At best, it was an empire by invitation, that is, other countries in Europe and elsewhere wishing protection against Stalinism sought Americans out.

So it is my impression that it is with a great sense of relief that the Cold War came to an end. Most Americans want to bring the boys home as quickly as possible, and to concentrate on dealing with our own questions. People like Charles Krauthammer, who say that Americans must rule the world, evoke very little response. Americans do not want to rule the world. However, we are never again going to be classical isolationists in the pre-Pearl Harbor sense; we are far too tied up in the world for that. Moreover, our economy is far more vulnerable to world economic currents than it ever was before. There is a world market now, and we cannot subtract ourselves from it. So we're not going to be isolationists, but we're not going to be an imperial power, and far from this requiring a sense of dislocation, I think Americans are responding with a sense of relief.

Daphne Merkin: I just wanted to respond to something Professor Schlesinger said. I think the ability to be comfortable as an imperial power – or the ability to be comfortable with the notion of class – is a condition that separates America from Britain and France. This is not a country that, in my experience, has ever been comfortable with the notion of class; it became no more comfortable with the notion of class during the egalitarian sixties, up on through the elitist Reagan years. It struck me, watching the three presidential fellows debating with elaborate casualness on television last night, that in the end Bush's failure to embrace a woman from the audience, who asked a not entirely coherent question (in which she confused the deficit with the recession), lost him an enormous amount of what I suppose would be called populist support. In other words, his inability to descend from his own patrician heights and demonstrate any, at least any telegenic, understanding of the plight of the middle and lower classes is costing him votes on the subliminal as well as the manifest level. Whether that is any reflection on Bush's

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actual ability to govern, or Clinton's actual ability to govern (I'll leave out Ross Perot, who seems to me, aside from his proficiency with one-liners, beside the point), is an interesting question, and one that has not been particularly addressed. I think class considerations and class animus remain the unspoken negative obsessions in America; if you look closely, you'll see them casting shadows all over this election. I'm curious to know what you think about this.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: Well, I do think that part of the capacity to govern successfully is to have a sense of the people, to understand what they are talking about, and to have some identification with the distress and problems people have. One of Bush's troubles is a lack of social imagination, when he tries to perceive the problems of anyone beyond the country-club set. On the other hand, the mere capacity to exploit people's distress in a demagogic way doesn't guarantee wise government.

Barbara Gordon: Professor Schlesinger, you were talking about the decline of the American political party and Americans' growing indifference to associating themselves with a political party, in the community sense, in the sense of ideology. I think there's another reason that hasn't been mentioned here, and that it is quite intentional. This gridlock that everyone has been screaming about, keeping things bottled up – in a certain sense, Americans want that. They want the social and economic largesse in their towns and their communities that they suspect will come from the party of the Democrats, but for at least the last twelve years they felt that having a Republican in the White House was the best thing, after the disaster of Jimmy Carter. So, as much as Perot and everyone says we have to get rid of that gridlock, I think it's a balance that makes many Americans very comfortable and therefore diminishes their need to be associated with a party. It leaves them free and easy to swing in this way. I wonder what your comment on this might be?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: I would agree that the American electorate wants divided government, and that's why they have been voting rather consistently for it since the Second World War. But I would add another point. A serious reason why we have preferred divided government is to check and contain the imperial presidency. When foreign policy becomes dominant, as it has been since Pearl Harbor, power flows to the presidency. Congress is perfectly willing to challenge the presidency on domestic questions, because legislators think they know just as much if not more than the executive branch does about internal problems. But there is a tendency to defer to the presidency on external problems, on the grounds, sometimes real, sometimes wrong, that the president has su-

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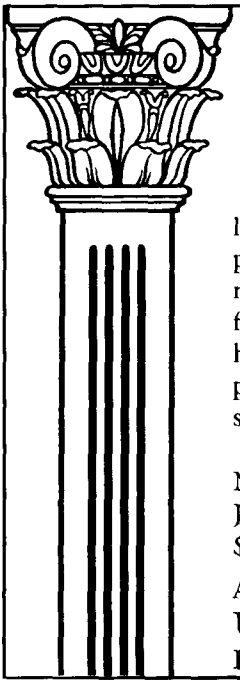
perior sources of information, superior judgment – let him take the responsibility.

In a period of protracted international crisis, power flows to the presidency. Given that situation, one way in which voters can check the pretensions of the imperial presidency, is to give Congress to the opposition party. So I would add this as another reason why the voters, I believe, quite deliberately prefer to live with divided government. If we had given Nixon a Congress he could control, God knows what might have happened to the Republic.

Edith Kurzweil: Are there any more questions from our audience? It doesn't look as if there are. If not, we will adjourn for refreshments. Thank you all very much.



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STEVEN MARCUS

George Orwell: Biography as Literature

Orwell, like his favorite novelist, Dickens, has turned out to be one of those writers who is worth stealing. Critical commentaries of virtually all ideological persuasions, right, left, and center, claiming him for themselves, have been steadily put forward ever since his early death in 1950, and there is no sign that this inundation of secondary and by now even tertiary matter – commentaries upon the commentaries – is going to abate. One part of this explanatory-persuasive effort is primarily biographical in emphasis. In addition to the impressive array of memoirs and personal recollections of Orwell at all ages, from earliest youth and school days right up (or down) to his death from tuberculosis in a London hospital, there have so far been three major biographical projects. The first of these, *The Unknown Orwell* and *Orwell: The Transformation*, by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, took Orwell through his experiences in Spain in 1937. This original work in two volumes (published in 1972 and 1979) was undertaken without the consent of Orwell's widow, Sonia Orwell; indeed, it was pursued against her active non-cooperation and resistance. The second, *George Orwell: A Life* by Bernard Crick, was commissioned by Sonia Orwell as an antidote and counterstatement to Stansky and Abraham's account. Crick's biography is a relatively massive compilation and ordering of material, full of information, and of great and lasting interest. But it did not please Orwell's widow either, and she tried unsuccessfully to prevent its publication. Now, a little more than a decade later, there has appeared another, as it were, official life, "authorized" on this occasion by the London agent who is Orwell's current literary executor (Sonia Orwell died in 1980) and building usefully on the work done by its predecessors. There is no reason to suppose that Michael Shelden's *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* (HarperCollins, 1991), will not be superseded in due time by further studies, but the story it has to tell, and the way that Shelden has told it, is worth the reader's attention.

It seems quite clear that in addition to the interest sustained by his writings – novels, essays, reviews, documentaries, autobiographical experiments, and accounts – and by his political writings in particular (which appeared in all the foregoing forms and genres), Orwell's life itself generates and sustains an interest of its own. Every memoir and biographical

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bearing of witness conveys the ineffaceable sense that his was an exemplary life, that its forty-seven years were compounded of experiences in which representative phases of the cultural and political history of the twentieth century were both compressed and registered with exceptional clarity, complexity, and saliency – and that in significant measure these qualities, which seem to carry also a special moral and pedagogical gravity, still endure in Orwell's writing.

That life actually began at the tail end of Victorian Britain, and part of the continuing interest of Orwell's experiences is that they dramatize from one set of representative perspectives the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, from late Victorian culture and society to modernity, modernism, and the modern. English literature seems peculiarly rich in figures who embody and negotiate these transitions in different ways, but no writer, I think, surpasses Orwell in the poignancy with which he felt and articulated those changes, or in the centrality they occupy in his larger preoccupations.

Orwell's father was born in 1857 (*Little Dorrit*, for example, was still coming out in monthly installments); he made a career in the Civil Service in India, promoting the profitable opium trade. Orwell himself was born in 1903, and his childhood was in almost every way characteristic of a certain marginal segment of the life and culture of upper middle-class Edwardian Britain. Despite its social standing, the family was never affluent, and the obviously clever young Eric Blair (Orwell came later as part of his writer's identity) was taken on, at the age of seven, as a scholarship student at one of those private boarding and preparatory schools that flourished particularly during this period. In such institutions several generations of middle-class British male youth experienced much of their childhood and virtually all of adolescence as, in significant degree, abandonment, orphanage, and reorientation in an essentially homosexual and hierarchical communal universe. Although the experience was internally a terrible one for Blair, he nonetheless continued to develop cognitively. He was prompt enough at performing and parroting what was required on written examinations to win an extremely coveted scholarship to Eton, which he entered at the age of fourteen.

Situated at the top of the educational-social pyramid, the youthful Blair was at the same time in a condition of adolescent rebellion, self-deprecation and self-dislike, and something that seemed very close to depression. Although he read widely and voraciously, he had also decided not to achieve or complete much of the required work, and he slid steadily and permanently toward the bottom of his class. Since there was no family money to send him on to Oxford or Cambridge, and since his inferior academic performance had put further scholarship competition

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out of the question, Blair chose to follow the path pursued by his father (and other family members) and go out to the distant Empire. His motives in this undertaking were characteristically mixed, contradictory and conflicted. On the one side, he was identifying with his family, the Anglo-Indian imperial tradition, the class system, and the idea of a "safe" and relatively well-paid adventure (he became an imperial police officer in Burma); on the other, he was sending himself into exile, loneliness, and relative hardship, isolating himself in one of the least pleasant outposts of British rule, and joining up with an oppressive and despotic system that he had consciously ceased to believe in before he ever volunteered to serve it.

He remained in Burma for five years, regarding himself inwardly as a general failure and outcast among other ne'er-do-wells and reprobates. He continued to be gloomy and morose, and part of his depressive mood was connected to his awareness that he was actively part of a tyrannical social order that he both represented and despised. He came, at least in part, to identify himself as well with the coerced and oppressed Burmese, while feeling impotent rage against them for their resentful and teasing behavior towards him and other whites, and virtually equal fury against himself for occupying an official position that was rightfully bound to incur such hostility and aggression. In a short time, the landscape of Burma and what it represented took on for him, he later wrote, "the qualities of a nightmare."

After five years he found a way, via sick leave, to return to Europe. He had decided to quit the police and become a writer. He now rejected the world of Empire and privilege and chose to embrace the poor and outcast of England and Europe. These projects were simultaneously put in motion; Blair/Orwell disguised himself as a tramp and vagrant in England, and as a penniless foreigner in Paris, where he worked as a dishwasher. Partly as a matter of penance, reparation, and self-punishment, and partly in search of material to write about, he pursued an existence of penury and hardship during the years of the Depression. These experiences, mostly in England, helped to lead him to a belief in socialism, and this belief led in turn to his volunteering to fight in Spain, where he was dangerously wounded. He turned all of these events (as well as virtually everything else that happened to him) into writing almost at once. Spain led directly to disillusionment with the Communist Party, Stalin and Stalinism, even as Orwell remained a loyal but critical – and idiosyncratic – adherent to the Socialist left. In time, this commitment devolved into an identification with the cause of the Western (and capitalist) democracies against fascism – although Orwell always remained a self-confessed socialist of sorts – and to temporary reidentification with the cause of Empire, during a period of employment as a propagandist

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for the BBC's India service during World War Two. He finally threw up this work as intolerably opposed to the intellectual, as well as the political, principles that had directed his writing life.

All of these developments were accompanied by his steady stream of writings as an independent essayist, reviewer and journalist and were followed by his two most popular works, the anti-Stalinist satire and fable, *Animal Farm*, and the prophetic dystopia, *1984*. The only thing he missed was the long playing-out of the Cold War, but he had already distinctly imagined the two most plausible possible endings to it. Orwell's *1984* was an extremely dark warning of what might happen if the West were to succumb to bureaucratic and totalitarian tendencies – it would be Stalinism, the thought police and brutality without foreseeable end. At the same time, he envisaged quite unambiguously the weaknesses that are entailed in representing the historical future as only a continuation of the most dire aspects of the political present, and in a great essay on James Burnham he made his dialectical counterstatement to *1984* unimpeachably clear. Those who are excessively attracted to power, like Burnham, he remarks, have blurred "political judgment, because [the attraction to power] leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue. Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible." And, he goes on to conclude, after having witnessed and lived through the rise and fall of Hitler's Germany, "The Russian regime will either democratize itself, or it will perish." He was right both ways.

Orwell's life as a combined writer, participant, and observer in the historical and cultural worlds of the twentieth century is hence exceptionally compact and of a piece – which is not to say that it was without many contradictions and disparate tendencies. Such a life makes for attractively coherent biographical constructions and for cultural history read through works often directly produced by the experiences of that life; in turn, such works helped to further sustain that life, to move and urge it on to its next stages of evolution. Shelden is aware of these circumstances and realizes that a good biography has to be an interesting narrative as well, though his own narrative is relatively light on the analysis of Orwell's work and on its placement within the contexts of twentieth-century literature, modernism, and international cultural life. It also contains one large and consistently apparent flaw. It tries continually to "normalize" Orwell, to make him seem like some ordinary, sensible person, distinguished from others only by his gift for writing, when this is clearly not the case. As a writer, Orwell in part identified himself for special purposes with ordinary "decent" English middle- and working-class people and values, but that is very different from asserting that he was

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psychically more or less like almost everyone else.

From the very outset, there was much about him, apart from his evident brightness and giftedness, that was strikingly different, although these differences were not uniformly apparent or visible to every observer. According to his own testimony, Orwell felt isolated and unattractive from early childhood on. These sentiments and predispositions were most clearly manifested in his generally non-gregarious behavior throughout his life and in his extremely close privacy about his personal existence. He was in addition from a very early age preternaturally sensitive – in both responsive and resistant senses – to coerciveness, oppression, spiritual and physical violence, unfair and unequal treatment, and to the emotions of anger, rage, and resentment in himself as well as in others. Associated with these characteristics was an acute preoccupation with bad smells, with dirt, with alimentary and excretory functions, and an obsession with rats – all of these pointing to unconscious psychic conflicts in certain obvious developmental areas. Moreover, he was conscious from a very early point of being at the same time exploited and part of an exploiting class and system.

These strong and adverse conflicting forces, acting on young Blair both consciously and unconsciously, worked among much else to produce something like a state of protracted depression in him that lasted from at least late boyhood until at least 1936-37, when he was almost killed in Spain. This angry, isolating, and guilt-ridden constellation of emotions was mixed from the very beginning with both self-punishing and sado-masochistic tendencies. It led, among other things, to Orwell's irresistible inclination throughout his life toward situations in which he would live in hardship, deprivation, and suffering. He even courted illness right up to his death, which was at least in part a result of a lifetime semi-conscious flirtation with the tuberculosis that eventually killed him. The multitudinous details of how he elaborated and played these tendencies out in the various phases and episodes of his life are to be found prominently on display everywhere in his writings. Circumstances and considerations such as these make Orwell's biography a perennial challenge, and it must be said that Shelden, taking the prudent course, steers clear of most of them. As a result, his book, though interesting, is largely pedestrian as well.

At the same time, Orwell usually managed to integrate what might ordinarily and otherwise be neurotic choices and behaviors with culturally significant circumstances and moments. Burma; urban destitution during the Depression; the lives of miners and other working-class people in industrial Britain in the mid-thirties; doomed Republican Spain; poorly-paid anti-Stalinist political journalism in the thirties and forties; the accelerating, dreadful, and inevitable approach of the world's most

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terrible war; and finally, isolation and virtual self-mortification on the primitive island of Jura in the Hebrides after World War Two – all of these preoccupations were connected to tendencies in Orwell's psyche, whose expression was partly unconscious and at least equally in part neurotic and self-destructive. Yet it is how Orwell managed to create historical, literary, and political significance out of such overdetermined choices that is of more genuine interest – and how, especially in his non-fictional and autobiographical prose, he was able to enlist his deepest conflicts to at least in some degree momentarily transcend them, as he also largely does in *Animal Farm* and *1984*. It is this quasi-conscious creative use of his neurosis that makes Orwell recognizable not merely as a writer but distinctly recognizable as a modern as well.

As an illustration of what might be needed for a full-scale literary and cultural analysis of Orwell as a modern writer of sustained historical importance, we may regard very briefly one set of impulses in him and how, embedded in a specific group of biographical and cultural circumstances, they were worked out and transmuted into writing that is of permanent interest. As I have already noted, Orwell's five years as a colonial police officer and administrator had left him with a burden of guilt, confusion, self-loathing, and undischarged anger and aggressiveness. It had also brought closer to the surface his desire to become a writer, a lifelong ambition that he had consciously frustrated and displaced during his years in Burma. When he returned to England and Europe, these inner circumstances began to express themselves in a series of decisions and actions. In order to apprentice himself as a writer, he abandoned for temporary periods his identity as a member of the genteel middle classes. He masqueraded as a vagrant and a tramp and lived for periods on the road, in casual, workhouse wards and other temporary shelters for the homeless and destitute that English government and voluntary charitable institutions had evolved over the previous century. He undertook these "adventures" both as a form of self-laceration and penitence and as a way of appropriating material to write about. He consorted with the homeless, painfully disabled his hands by picking hops, and then promptly wrote about the experiences. In a similar manner in Paris, he passed himself off as penniless, more or less voluntarily chose to starve for days at a time, and slaved at the lowest and most self-punishing labor he could find. About the only part of these experiences (apart from the unexamined urges that compelled him to seek them in the first place) that was involuntary was his hospitalization with bronchitis and pneumonia – an occurrence that he also turned to capital use in his unforgettable essay, "How the Poor Die."

The chief result of these strategies of behavior was his first book,

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Down and Out in Paris and London, published in 1933. One of the more striking things about this work is not merely how good and original it is and how well it stands up as prose after sixty years, but how deeply embedded in a tradition of British writing it is as well. It is, among much else, part documentary, part autobiography, and part fiction, a form that someone has probably already called docufiction (or faction) and that Orwell would compose in throughout his entire career. It is a distinguished work in the line of English writing about poverty, urban immiseration and homelessness, and is its most important modern representative. But it is also an extremely literary piece of work and belongs to a tradition of English fiction and documentary writing that uses and modernizes the classical "inheritance plot" as a means of social exploration and a device for social commentary and criticism. We find this plot in such works of fiction as *Tom Jones* and *Oliver Twist*, in which the hero, born into penurious, deprived, and lowly circumstances, discovers himself in the end as actually a gentleman by right of birth as well as character. It is further updated, as it were, in such novels as Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, which Orwell admired from an early age (it was published in the year of his birth). In this and similar novels of the late Victorian period, the protagonist's fall out of the middle classes and into lower-class poverty is both represented as actual suffering and want and at the same time mitigated by the convenience that there tend regularly to be middle-class relatives and friends waiting in the wings to pull the hero out of his desperate and abandoned condition of social existence. We see it again among the conventions of popular fiction, such as some of the Sherlock Holmes tales and the Raffles stories, in which the upper middle-class detective or genteel burglar disguises himself as a member of the outcast classes in order to achieve his purposes of discovery, exploration, and adventure. And it is there as well, in its most significant variant form, in the nineteenth-century tradition of the investigation of urban slum life, a line that begins as early as 1815, and to which such diverse writers as Pierce Egan, Dickens, Engels, L. C. Greenwood, Jack London, and Beatrice Webb made contributions.

In this kind of writing, the middle-class explorer-investigator also, as often as not, dresses and behaves as a member of the oppressed, outcast, exploited, and penniless in order to find out how they lived and felt, and to be able to testify sympathetically about them. I call this the "inheritance plot" because there is never any doubt that these writers and characters are continually aware of their "genuine" middle-class identities, There is no mistaking the structural relation of their situation to the classical, conventional plots in both tragedy and comedy out of which these representations of such behavior partly developed; nor is it possible

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to overlook the apprehensions about social contingency and fragility that these writings often dramatize. The inheritance plot is, among much else, a means for dramatizing both upward and downward social mobility, for achieving perspective on the relations and differences among the classes, for asserting friendly identification between the comfortable middle and disadvantaged lower classes on the one hand, and for the reassuring devices that sustain the substantial and harsh distinctions between them on the other. In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and in *Homage to Catalonia*, as well as in some of his great essays on English society and culture, Orwell demonstrated that he was one of the supreme masters of these forms of social and literary representation and its last important modern practitioner.

What I have just summarily referred to may be taken as a preliminary sketch of Orwell's awareness of a cultural tradition of representation, and of his own situatedness in it, as well as of the kind of analysis that might do justice to the dense convergence of material from a variety of contexts that is to be found in his writing. As a finishing touch in such an exercise, one might add that it was for the publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London* that he changed his name from Eric Blair to George Orwell. That decision too was dense with confluent determinations. Blair/Orwell had, he said, always disliked the name he was given; he was also slightly ashamed for his family's sake of some of the disreputable material in the book (which may also be part of the reason he appended to it the extraordinary and entirely unbelievable subtitle, "A Novel"). At the same time, he hit upon one of the happiest pen names in English, although there is no evidence known to me that indicates how much he was aware of what was entering into this behavior.

Similar kinds of analyses are needed for all of Orwell's work, including its final phase, the writing of *1984* and his terminal illness, second marriage, and death. Shelden's biography does supply us with more material about Orwell's relations with women than any previous study. In particular, Orwell's conduct toward the end of his life, his relations with and marriage to Sonia Brownell on what was virtually his deathbed, and his unconstrained, destructive abandonment of himself in his urgent need to finish *1984*, all bring into play personal inner forces and cultural circumstances perceptible in much of his earlier work. On this latter occasion, however, they are displayed in a different set of configurations, as he completes his writer's life's work on a simultaneously grim and triumphant note in *1984*, and dissolves his personal existence into the neurotic and self-mortifying components that the written work had for the most part rendered into less destructive forms. That life, as I have suggested, has an extraordinary integral impetus to it. Part of Orwell's sin-

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gular moral authority as a writer is connected to the reader's sense of the connection between what is on the page and the lived experience it articulates and impels. But that life and those writings are themselves, in addition, vivid refractions of the historical era through which Orwell's experiences were compounded. They are all confluent elements of a sustained historical episode that ranged from World War One through the Cold War and made up what most of us in the West think of as the twentieth century. That episode and century came to an effective end in 1989, five years after Orwell's mythological date, through means and ways not envisaged in Orwell's admonitory novel but which, as I have indicated, Orwell elsewhere had made out quite particularly.

The heterogeneous coherences of our relatively short but dreadfully intense historical epoch are connected in a multitude of respects with the peculiar coherence of Orwell's life and work. In some senses that coherence seems more in keeping with the nineteenth than the twentieth century. As his acquaintance Anthony Powell acutely observed, "In many ways Orwell was a Victorian figure, for, like most people 'in rebellion,' he was more than half in love with what he was rebelling against." But Orwell was equally a modern and a modernist in his self-consciousness, his inner dividedness, his actings-out and risk-takings, and his radical social desires, along with his conservative cultural predispositions. In his instance, the challenge of critical fullness is to make out both the neurosis and the impulses toward balance and autonomy; the determined ordinariness along with the gifts of honesty, intelligence, and courage pursued with such steadfastness, single-mindedness, and intensity that they become something like genius. In addition, the critical aim should be to acknowledge the drivenness impelling both Orwell's life and work, along with the powers of choice that both affected such drivenness and were swept up into it.

In Orwell, all of these oppositions of forces and impulses are connected; they are not simple or uninflected contradictions. The contradictions are complex, dynamic, and historical – coherent in their heterogeneity, as was the cultural epoch in which he lived and wrote. The impulse of those on the left, right, and center to kidnap him for their own causes is entirely understandable, but none of them can succeed in these undertakings of theft. He belongs to himself and to the historical world of which he was an active and creditable part.

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ROBERT S. WISTRICH

Jewish Intellectuals and Mass Politics in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna

Fin-de-siècle Vienna, it is widely acknowledged, was at one and the same time the scene of one of the most seminal intellectual revolutions that ushered in the twentieth century, and a city that felt more acutely than most the tremors of imminent social and political disintegration. Here, perhaps sooner than anywhere else, intellectuals had to confront the implications of the fragmentation of European high culture and the challenge of irrationalism expressed in the rise of a new, more strident style of mass politics that threatened the very existence of the institutional and social order in which they lived. Part of the fascination this period now exerts on contemporaries is no doubt linked to the innovative responses that the Viennese intelligentsia developed in the face of this challenge. At the same time, one recognizes, in the mood of pessimism, defensiveness, and even powerlessness that gripped many of the Viennese intellectuals, analogies with the confusion of our own times, with its breakdown of old certainties, established ideologies, traditional paradigms of social thought, and received norms of behavior.

The crisis of liberal rationalism occurred earlier and more dramatically in Vienna than it did elsewhere in Western Europe. Here, the fragility of liberal "modernity" – bourgeois, capitalist, legalist, and rationalist – was exposed with a sharpness and at times a brutality that cast into doubt its fundamental premises and presuppositions about the nature of the individual and his place in society. It has been persuasively argued that in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, it was essentially *political* frustrations, emerging out of the crisis of liberal culture, that led to the discovery of that "dangerous and mercurial creature, psychological man," as Carl Schorske put it – a creature moved more by feeling and instinct than by abstract reason. With the rise of mass parties in the 1880s that would successfully challenge the liberal hegemony – Pan-Germans, Slavic nationalists, Social Democrats, and above all the anti-Semitic Christian-Social Party led by Karl Lueger – the antiliberal tide seemed irresistible. By 1895, Vienna had been conquered by a mass movement from below, whose guiding principles, anti-Semitism, clericalism, and municipal socialism, were the direct antithesis of classical liberal teaching. By the turn of the century, liberal

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parliamentary power on the national level in Austria had been decisively broken.

This was the public context that favored a reassessment of the rationalist assumptions about human nature and the inevitability of progress, a painful reorientation which underlay the prevailing climate of anxiety and impotence in the ranks of the *haute bourgeoisie* and most of its leading representatives. The fact that this bourgeoisie, and especially its most prominent intellectuals in Vienna, was predominantly Jewish gave an added intensity and emotional charge to the cultural crisis and distinguished it from similar tendencies visible elsewhere in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. For anti-Semitism was, after all, the primary vehicle that had served to subvert the status quo in Viennese society, sweeping away its liberal foundations and, in doing so, calling into question the legal basis for Jewish emancipation. These ominous developments coincided with the entry of the masses into the political arena. Thus there was the understandable temptation for many Austrian intellectuals to regard the *realm of politics as a whole* as a sphere ruled by irrationality, a temptation all the greater for the strongly-represented Jewish element within the Viennese intelligentsia, which was the most directly threatened by the rise of political anti-Semitism. The popular success and resonance of the new illiberal and antiliberal mass politics of Lueger's movement created an unmistakable social and psychological pressure, inevitably affecting the identity and self-perception of many Jewish intellectuals and artists, even as they sought to flee from its ravages, whether into the temple of pure science or that of aestheticism for its own sake.

Some, like the completely assimilated Catholic poet of partly Jewish origin, Hugo von Hoffmannstahl, sought refuge in the Habsburg imperial tradition, attempting to resublimate politics into a ceremonial form that would canalize the irrational by accepting the primacy of instinct and refining it in a new cultural thesis based on older Austrian cosmopolitan values, ultimately rooted in the Baroque. Others, like the dramatist Arthur Schnitzler, embittered and disgusted by the irrationality and "demonic" character of the political realm, tried to hold on to the skeptical individualism of the liberal heritage while abandoning its optimistic belief in reason and progress. Karl Kraus, that supreme individualist, remained equally distrustful of all the new mass movements (including social democracy) while denouncing the liberal cult of progress that "subordinated the purpose to the means of subsistence" and subjugated mankind to the rapacious economy and the sensationalist press. The image of Austrian liberalism was, for Kraus, irrevocably associated with stock-exchange profiteering and the capitalist oligarchy whose mouthpiece was *Die Neue Freie Presse*. This incomparable satirist who once de-

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scribed *fin-de-siècle* Austria as "a proving ground for world destruction" and who deplored "the destruction of the spirit" by that tragic triad, *Tinte, Technik und Tod* (ink, technology and death), had no illusions about either capitalist democracy or the coming age of the masses, announced by the slaughter of the First World War and prefigured, so he believed, by a war-mongering Austrian press.

Freud had an even lower opinion of the masses or, more precisely, of the *Pöbel* (mob), evident in his *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921), where they are characterized *inter alia* as impulsive, changeable and fickle, credulous, violent, driven by savage instincts, and lacking the remotest critical faculty. Quoting extensively from Gustave Le Bon's "deservedly famous" *Psychologie des Foules* (1895), whose elitist, antidemocratic message would later influence both Mussolini and Hitler (and which Freud unreservedly described as a "brilliantly executed picture of the group mind"), the founder of psychoanalysis emphasized how little the masses were amenable to either reason or logic. Freud unabashedly noted that Le Bon's depiction of the crowd "fits so well with our psychology in the emphasis which it lays upon *unconscious* life." Basically uninterested in the concrete, empirical conditions of mass formation and political psychology in his own time and place, Freud ultimately saw in the mass mind a resurrection of the primal horde (*Urhorde*), enabling the individual to throw off all sense of responsibility and return to his pristine, barbarian condition.

Many years later, another Jewish intellectual shaped by his stay in interwar Vienna, Elias Canetti, in his book *Masse und Macht*, would provide an imaginative literary-anthropological investigation of the formation, crystallization, rhythm, and discharge of crowds that captures their internal dynamic in a way Freudian psychoanalysis never succeeded in doing. He thereby threw a novel light on the relation among power, paranoia, and the psychology of the survivor. Canetti's obsession with crowds, it should be noted, had been decisively shaped by his witnessing of the burning of the Justizpalast in Vienna in 1927 and by the wild hysteria of the masses in the Heldenplatz at the time of Hitler's *Anschluss* in 1938. As with Freud, the primitive irrationality of the crowd is a *given* in the work of Canetti and that of his Viennese contemporary, the philosopher and novelist Hermann Broch, who in his American exile devoted a special study to the subject of *Massenpsychologie*. It was also Broch who later described *fin-de siècle* Vienna as the metropolis of kitsch and the center of the European value-vacuum (*Wert-Vakuum*).

There is a common ground of cultural pessimism underlying the social theories of these and other Viennese writers who, like Broch, em-

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phasize the stupidity and herd-like character, the lack of *Ich-Bewusstsein* in the *Massenmensch*, or who describe how, in Freud's words, "all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch, are stirred up to find free gratifications" in the group mind. This deep-rooted skepticism, which often led in Europe to a fundamental rejection of the rationalist premises of liberal-democratic thought, was not, of course, confined to Vienna. Conservative French writers like the historian Hippolyte Taine, the Orientalist Ernest Renan, the previously mentioned Gustave le Bon, and Gabriel Tarde, or Cesare Lombroso and Scipio Sighele in Italy, saw in the suggestibility and volatility of the masses a dangerous byproduct of the legacy of Jacobin revolutionism and the new industrial, urban society. For their part, Burckhard and Nietzsche, from the standpoint of Central European high culture, denounced the inherent barbarism and "leveling" effects of democratic politics as such; the Italian-Jewish criminologist Lombroso significantly inaugurated at the end of the nineteenth century the scientific study of crowd life as a branch of *criminal* anthropology.

Among a significant section of the European intelligentsia after 1870, this psychopathological approach to crowd behavior reflected a climate of disillusion with democracy. Such fear and disdain of the masses seem to have been shared by the young Freud, writing to his fiancée from Paris in 1886 about the uncanny quality of the French capital and its inhabitants: "I believe they are all possessed of a thousand demons. Instead of 'Monsieur' and 'Voilà l'Écho de Paris,' I hear them screaming, 'À la lanterne!' or 'À bas dieser und jener!' They are the people of psychical epidemics, of historical mass convulsions." Freud's youthful fantasy of Paris as the dark city of Revolution reveals his early and endemic suspicion of mass politics. His experiences in the Vienna of the 1890s could have only reinforced his sense of the mass mind as best compared to the mentality of children, neurotics, and despotically ruled savages, a view that did not fully crystallize until after 1918.

Not all of the Viennese *Bildungsbürgertum* shared this Freudian pessimism, though they undoubtedly feared the leveling power of the masses and were increasingly traumatized by the collapse of the liberal middle ground in Austrian politics. Right up until his suicide in 1942, Stefan Zweig, for example, gallantly battled to maintain the values of reason and *Bildung* inherited from the classical German Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century, refined by the supranational European cosmopolitanism of Habsburg Austria. The notion of mobilizing the masses through national myths and religious symbols remained entirely alien to his way of thinking, which pitted the autonomy of the individual against the slavish, herd-like obedience of the masses. Zweig was convinced that

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humanity could progress towards universality only through the cultivation of individuals and never *en masse*. He always sought in his popular novels and biographies to decompose the masses into their individual components and thereby *humanize* them, to demonstrate that it was the moral and intellectual capacities of individual human beings which ultimately determine events.

Yet Stefan Zweig's poignant commitment to Europe's humanist culture rigorously excluded any *political* action (despite his militant pacifism) and literally paralyzed him in the 1930s when confronted by the frenzied German masses who rallied to Hitler. Ironically, in his classic memoir, *Die Welt von Gestern*, an unscrupulous Austrian demagogue, similar to Karl Lueger (who served as a political role model for the young Hitler in Vienna) is sympathetically portrayed by Zweig as an irreproachable democrat, serenely integrated into the "Golden Age of Security" that allegedly existed before 1914. Only the brutalized, beer-swilling German Nationalist *Korpstudenten* at the prewar Austrian universities with their racist anti-Semitism (according to Zweig), appear to trouble the *luxe, calme et volupté* of that era before the deluge, when the world of theater, poetry, and music relegated political and military events to the insignificant margins of consciousness for his fellow literati of *Jung Wien*.

Not all the intellectuals of "Young Vienna," however, were as impervious as Zweig to the public sphere of politics or looked solely to the pure world of *Geist* as a secure sanctuary from religious intolerance and racial prejudice. One of the most spectacular exceptions to the rule and one of the best examples of a *fin-de-siècle* Viennese intellectual who sought collective solutions and a final exit from the disintegrating liberal culture of his age was undoubtedly Theodor Herzl. His was clearly a specifically *political* response to the broader dilemmas of Jewish powerlessness throughout the long history of exile, one which entailed organizing the masses hitherto neglected by the Jewish liberal establishment in its period of ascendency. Herzl's success in capturing the imagination of the Eastern Jewish masses (*Ostjuden*) and impressing Zionism on the consciousness of the Gentile world was a *tour de force* of dramatic orchestration. It owed not a little to his intuitive yet profoundly Viennese sense of theater, of the importance of myth, symbolism, and the imponderables that unconsciously mold the life of individuals and nations.

In a collection of fragmentary thoughts for the *Judenstaat*, Herzl revealingly wrote: "In fact, in all this I am still a dramatist. I take poor, ragged fellows from the street, dress them in beautiful garments and let them perform before the world a wonderful play which I have devised. I do not operate any more with individual people but with masses: clergy,

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army administration, academy, etc., all for me – *mass* units." Like many of his Viennese contemporaries, Herzl instinctively grasped the aesthetic and symbolic dimension of modern politics, the dialectical interaction between myth and objective reality, between the unconscious forces in the lives of individuals and the structural socio-economic factors that underlay "Jewish distress" (*Judennot*) in late nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe. Zionism as a political mass movement presupposed this context of real misery (which marked it off from other utopian projects like the *Freiland* plan of the liberal journalist Theodor Hertzka, another Hungarian-born Viennese Jewish contemporary of Herzl), but it also needed a sense of dynamic form and even operatic spectacle to get it off the ground. This does not mean that Herzl, the Viennese aesthete turned politician, consciously became an *irrationalist* who deliberately exploited or manipulated the masses in order to fulfill personal ambitions or a pseudo-messianic complex (though Freud, with his innate suspicion of such political artists, probably suspected as much). Herzl responded to an objective crisis in Jewish life. He acutely diagnosed it in terms of the impact of modern anti-Semitism and the devastating blow to peaceful assimilation in European society that by the end of the 1890s it already heralded.

Herzl's special contribution, however, lay less in his sociopolitical analysis (anticipated by Leon Pinsker fifteen years earlier and by Nathan Birnbaum in his native Austria in the early 1890s) than in his ability to create the *illusion* of power where there was as yet none, by fostering in the Jews themselves a national consciousness and the belief that they could overcome their fate and translate the Herzlian vision of a Jewish state into a concrete, organizational goal. To forge this *will for nationhood*, to reawaken the dormant energies of the dispersed Jews, Herzl openly played on myths, symbols, dreams – many of them drawn from the arsenal of the romantic German nationalism he had espoused in his youth. "With a flag you can lead men," he told Baron de Hirsch in 1895, "for a flag, men live and die. In fact, it is the only thing for which they are ready to die in masses, if you train them for it." Herzl always attached special importance to outward symbols; hence the attention he paid to dress, bearing, deportment, and to the theatrical staging of the First Zionist Congress as an elegant, impressive, festive spectacle. As an experienced journalist, Herzl moreover was convinced that "noise is everything . . . in truth noise is a great deal. A sustained noise is in itself a noteworthy fact. All of world history is nothing but a noise." This theatrical sense of public relations, of image-building and the power of communications, magic and make-believe in public life, this readiness to tap the energies of the unconscious for political ends and to organize the

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masses was not only a personal trademark of Herzl, the failed dramatist transformed into a successful popular tribune. It also owed something to the special atmosphere of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

Such background perhaps helps to explain the tenacious resistance of so many of Herzl's Jewish intellectual and artistic contemporaries in Vienna to the Zionist project. In part, this opposition was, of course, a natural outcome of the "assimilationist" ideology of these Viennese Jews, their detestation of any form of rationalism and their obsessive fear, shared by many middle-class Jews, that Zionism might exacerbate rather than attenuate anti-Semitism. Artists and intellectuals like Freud, Zweig, and Karl Kraus, Arthur Schnitzler, Otto Weininger, Felix Salten, and Peter Altenberg inherently distrusted any collective and political solutions to the "Jewish" question – or for that matter any attempt to mobilize the masses, even in the name of the most elevated humanist ideologies or ideals. Indeed, much of their oeuvre can be read as an implicit moral condemnation of *homo politicus*, of military and political hegemony based on might or violence and as an expression of elitist contempt for the opportunistic horse-trading associated with almost any normal political activity. However skeptical, despairing, or critical of liberal values, they still clung to a tenacious conviction that the moral autonomy of the individual transcends any considerations of religion, ideology, nationality, and politics. Rightly or wrongly, they felt that their belief was as threatened by Herzl's Zionism as it was by other mass movements. The fact that this Jewish national movement was created by one of their own, by a figure who had seemed in his own person to represent the model of a cultivated Viennese liberal and to embody the assimilationist ideal even smacked to them of *betrayal*, if it did not also signal a total despair of the future; a majority of Jews in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna were as yet certainly unwilling to contemplate such despair.

Yet unlike Herzl, most Viennese intellectuals had not been able to analyze at close range the sociopolitical scene in France in the early 1890s, an experience that played a decisive role in Herzl's own metamorphosis from Viennese aesthete to would-be political artist and self-made expert on mass psychology. This formative experience, chronologically parallel to Lueger's growing triumphs back in Vienna, convinced the foreign correspondent of the *Neu Freie Presse* that only by adapting and channeling the new mass politics in the interests of Jewish nationalism could a long-term solution for the predicament of the Jews be found. Essentially, Herzl's *diagnosis* of the masses (formed by the internal crises of the French Republic) differed little from that of Freud or other Austrian liberals. Liberal democracy, in its French variant, was no panacea for a social order in crisis, racked by anarchy, terrorism, and class conflict,

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as well as threatened by the ignorance of the unenlightened masses. The French proletariat, in Herzl's eyes, resembled a "great beast beginning to stretch its limbs," still only half-conscious of its power. The *Volk*, he would add in 1896, is everywhere a "great child," inherently irrational, suggestible, amorphous, and fickle. It was a description with which Freud or Schnitzler might well have agreed and which regularly echoed in so much of *fin-de-siècle* bourgeois social thought. On the other hand, Herzl also believed that positive social action was vitally necessary to forestall the coming revolt of the masses, of which anti-Semitism was such a crucial and revealing symptom.

This conviction eventually brought Herzl to Zionism at the very moment in May of 1895 when he witnessed the cry of the Parisian mob against Dreyfus in the École Militaire (*À mort, à mort, les Juifs!*) and heard of Karl Lueger's first victory in the Viennese city council elections. Against what he held to be the ineradicable anti-Semitism of the masses, Herzl would pit a reconstituted Jewish *Volk*, created by the power of fantasy and a dynamic politics whose emotional core was a return to the Promised Land. By activating the latent dreams of the Jewish masses and leading them out of Europe as soon as possible, Herzl hoped to calm or at least to divert the anger of Gentile anti-Semites, about whose irrational fears and hatreds he had no illusions. The old condescension and even contempt toward the masses – so characteristic of Austro-liberalism, as it also was of conservative social thought in general – was now mixed with elements of understanding and even sympathy, especially for the Jewish masses in the Eastern ghettoes. Observing the Jewish workers in London's East End, Herzl observed that "the people are sentimental; the masses do not see clearly." Yet Herzl's legend grew on the foundation of his perception of the masses as being childish and simple. To adapt Schorske's striking and heavily Freudian phrase, the Jewish masses became for Herzl in his last years his lover and his mirror.

Potentially even more attractive to *fin-de-siècle* Viennese intellectuals, alienated from their class, religion, and culture, was the most powerful of all the mass movements to emerge in the long run from the matrix of a disintegrating liberal Vienna – the socialist workers' movement. Founded in 1889, the same year as its great rival the Christian-Social Party, Austrian social democracy adopted early the Marxist ideology of the class struggle, emphasizing the social deprivation of the urban masses (consistently ignored by classical liberalism) and the rigorous exclusion of the working classes from the political system. For all its demonstrative hostility to the liberals, Austrian social democracy inherited much of their universalist vision, their rationalist worldview, militant anticlericalism, and emphasis on *Bildung*. At the same time, its leader, Victor Adler,

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a Jewish-born intellectual who had converted to Protestantism, was no less successful an orchestrator and organizer of the masses than Herzl, or the Pan-German Georg von Schoenerer, or, for that matter, Karl Lueger were. In his youth, Adler had also been a German nationalist, a *révolté* against liberal rationalism, a passionate Wagnerian influenced by the latter's ideas of achieving a new harmonious community of the *Volk* through the regeneration of art, as well as a dabbler in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. On the other hand, Adler, as the socialist leader, consciously rejected the irrational, aesthetic style of politics that dominated the Austrian *fin-de-siècle*, despite his shrewd sense of the changing moods of the working masses and his feeling for the imponderables in politics. In this respect, he was the antithesis of his leading nationalist and anti-Semitic rivals, Georg von Schoenerer and Karl Lueger, and the very opposite of a fanatic or demagogue.

Adler's political style was very much in the tradition of Austrian liberalism with its concrete empiricism, respect for law, tolerant skepticism, and search for the conciliatory formula. At the same time, his relentless logic and devastating irony were viewed by anti-Semitic contemporaries as distinctively "Jewish," if not to say Talmudic, traits. The faith of Marxism in enlightenment, science, and reason, aligned with an idealistic passion for social justice and a messianic belief in the historic role or mission of the working class, were the decisive elements that brought many Jewish intellectuals into the working-class movement. Yet far from being alarmed at the disastrous decline of liberalism and the rise of anti-Semitism, the Austrian Social Democrats (including the Jews among them) positively welcomed it as a step toward a greater *democratization* of the inequitable electoral system and a heralding of the inevitable triumph of socialism.

If the *haute bourgeoisie*, the ennobled aristocracy, and the liberal Jewish intelligentsia felt increasingly paralyzed by the anti-Semitic successes of the 1890s, the socialist movement insisted that this was at best a temporary, ephemeral phenomenon of disoriented petty-bourgeois masses – duped and misled by deceptive slogans characteristic of a backward, semifeudal society where industrial capitalism had not yet sufficiently advanced. Admittedly, socialist Jewish intellectuals deplored the "clerical" demagogy of Christian socialism, its vulgarity and endemic *Bildungshass* immortalized by the remark of the Christian Social Deputy, Bielohlowek, "When I see a book I want to puke." (*"Wann i a Buachl siech, hab i's schon g'fressen."*) They also mocked the longstanding traditions of Viennese *Gemütlichkeit,* banality and trivialization, of theatricality and sham, so ably and shamelessly exploited by Lueger.

At the same time these Jewish intellectuals also saw a certain justifica-

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tion in the illiberal anti-Semitism of the masses; in their eyes it was a one-sided but ultimately beneficial (to the socialists) expression of anti-capitalist *ressentiment*. Once the "small man" (*Kleinbürger*) understood, however, that not all Jews were capitalists and not all capitalists were Jews; once he realized that *only* social democracy was serious about overthrowing capitalism as a whole, then anti-Semitism would gradually dissolve and disappear. In the meantime, the movement was an irritation, not so much because it attacked the Jews but because it was turning on values that social democrats hold dear – free thought, science, progress, and education – by exploiting the basest and most contemptible instincts of the masses. The Austrian socialist intellectuals remained overconfident, however, that the workers would never succumb to this anti-Semitic fanaticism and irrationality. They counted on their highly developed organizations, their class consciousness, and the tremendous efforts their party had invested in educating and enlightening the workers, to successfully resist such tendencies. No other socialist party in Europe (except possibly the Social Democratic Party) placed such an emphasis on its *Bildungsvereine* and on *Kulturpolitik*; on the creation, even before 1914, of a social, cultural, and spiritual "state within a state." The party was especially innovative during the interwar period when Red Vienna served as a bastion against the growing antidemocratic forces in the Austrian Republic. Not even the mindless hysteria of the patriotic crowds in the Ringstrasse, demonstrating in favor of the First World War, shook the Marxist intelligentsia's optimism in the historical mission and capacity of the masses for self-liberation. A chastened Victor Adler, though, confessed to the young Trotsky in August of 1914: ". . . all the unbalanced, all the madmen now come into the streets; it is their day. The murder of Jaurès is only the beginning. War opens the door for all instincts, all forms of madness."

Victor Adler, originally a psychiatric practitioner and a leader with a deep understanding and empathy for the laboring masses, had few illusions about Austrian politics, despite all his Marxist faith and rationalist logic. As he used to joke with Trotsky, his previous profession had splendidly prepared him for dealing with the lunatic asylum of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese public life. In Adler's case, the study of depth psychology did not undermine his optimistic faith as a Marxist social democrat in the possibility of a socialist society bringing about the creation of a free citizenry, a new liberated and nonalienated mankind. Unlike Freud, Adler did not believe that the masses were fundamentally childish, inherently hostile to culture, thirsting only for violent instinctual release, or longing for erotic submission to a leader. Unlike some of his more demagogic followers, Adler was definitely not an example of the *Führer as Verführer*

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(the leader as seducer) but rather of the political leader as an educator, physician, and organizer seeking to *humanize* the masses and sublimate their revolutionary energy towards the classical Enlightenment goal of *Bildung*. The ethical ideals of Austro-Marxism, like those of European bourgeois humanism, proved, however, to be somewhat fragile in the face of the growing mass appeal of fascism in Central Europe between the wars.

One of the most acute critics of the failure of Marxism to overcome this challenge was Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian disciple of Marx and Freud whose study, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (written between 1930 and 1933), was an important analytic breakthrough in the field. The younger, more radical Reich, who at the time gravitated towards the Austrian Communist Party, did not share Freud's theory of sublimation, his premise that repression sustains society and that permissiveness would subvert civilization. Nor could Reich accept the materialist assumption that mass psychology was rooted solely or even primarily in socioeconomic factors. He deplored the ignorance of the role of sexual repression displayed by Marxist sociology. He saw the roots of fascism, above all, in the authoritarian family structure created by four thousand years of mechanical civilization that had disturbed the biological system of the human personality and turned the masses into accomplices of their own oppression. The secret, unsatisfied orgiastic desires of the masses were expressed in the brutality, irrationality and sadism of Hitler and the Nazis, whose mystical race theories faithfully reflected a deep sexual *angst* and the unresolved fears of a patriarchal, authoritarian society. Hence, only a revolutionary *Sexualpolitik*, a libido-saturated *Gemeinschaft*, could ultimately liberate man from the kind of compulsive mass behavior, blind obedience, and reactionary herd-mentality that made fascism possible. This sexual revolution would finally enable the masses to take responsibility for themselves. Reich thereby sought to *politicize* Freud's theories, a further reason for the old master to disown his disciple, quite apart from his puritanical distaste for Reich's "Sexual Revolution."

Freud, like so many other Viennese intellectuals of his generation, remained to the end deeply ambivalent about politics in general, about parliamentarianism (once described by Karl Kraus as a way of "putting political prostitution in barracks") and about democracy, at least as long as the old monarchical order survived. Other Viennese cultural conservatives (including not a few Jewish intellectuals), suspicious of technology and progress, as alienated from the ethos of capitalism as they were from materialist Marxism, also felt that to retain a meaningful belief in individual truth and morality was incompatible with a commitment to social and political change. Their disillusion with political ideologies; their

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sense of the slow, irreversible decline of the Habsburg monarchy; their inability or unwillingness to synthesize the totality of human thought and experience into any coherent system; and their attachment to or else their revolt against the prevailing climate of aestheticism in Vienna – all these factors encouraged a disengagement from politics and an elitist distrust of mass democracy. As Karl Kraus put it in a polemic against the socialist *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in November of 1917: "The definition of the problem in terms of Democracy versus Autocracy is as empty a formulation as the vacuum of the age, which is merely more marked here in Austria than elsewhere in Europe."

What really preoccupied Karl Kraus and his contemporaries was how to rescue the culture of the free individual from the dehumanizing pressures of modernity. As a hive of anti-Semitic reaction, Vienna was one of the first major cities of Europe to discover the darker, pathological sides of modernity, one feature of which, the irrationalism of the masses, still remained a central and troubling component. This condition made the salvaging of what was preservable in the Central European enlightenment tradition seem particularly difficult and more precarious to the liberal Jewish intelligentsia. This was *not*, it should be stressed, a uniquely Viennese but a shared European experience of the *fin-de-siècle*, confronted with the preliminary rumblings and the first glimmer of the twentieth-century revolt of the masses. Today, the special fascination exerted by Vienna's former cultural elites seems to derive, at least in part, from their precocious disillusion with what has been called the failed progressivism of modernity. Almost a century later, what Herman Broch once called the "Gay Apocalypse" has all the discreet, beguiling, and fatal charm of a light opera rescripted by Oswald Spengler, to celebrate somewhat prematurely the decline of Western civilization.

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PEARL K. BELL

Fiction Chronicle

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Somewhere in his journals, George Orwell recalls a packet of books he was once asked to review for a London weekly. One was a novel set in Indochina, the other a study of eighteenth-century British agriculture, and in a covering note the editor had written: "These should go well together." A donnish joke, and probably apocryphal, but the anecdote comes to mind whenever I must pick and choose for a column about recent fiction. Do the eight novels discussed here "go well together"? Is there any reason why they should? There is such diversity and variety among novelists today that any large generalization seems arbitrary and suspect.

Why were these eight novels selected from the dozens published in the past few months? Obviously one cannot ignore the recent work of such established writers as John Updike, Julian Barnes, and Günter Grass, nor overlook new novels by such lesser but estimable figures as Maureen Howard, Michael Ondaatje, and Rosellen Brown. Susan Minot published a dazzling autobiographical novel, *Monkeys*, in 1986; her new book, *Folly*, could not be omitted from a discussion of serious fiction. And then there are meteoric debuts like Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, published in a whirlwind of mink-lined hype and money beyond most writers' wildest dreams of avarice. Since most first novels sink without a trace, and the recession has made publishers wary and stingy, why was *The Secret History* anointed so lavishly by the gods of literary success – big-bucks advance, movie rights, six-figure paperback auctions, ecstatic

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profiles of the twenty-eight-year-old author in *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*, *Vogue*? All sorts of explanations have been suggested, and the fact that there's usually one media-hype every season may be as good as any. But there remains the enigma, particularly after we've actually read the book, as to what the fuss is all about. To start, then, with the ridiculous.

Murder – two murders, in fact – is presumably the central drama of Tartt's campus novel. But it is not a detective story and there's no mystery, since we are told the who and how of the murders before they occur. Nor is there any adequate attempt to explore the motives and consequences of the killings. As the narrator, Richard Papen, airily remarks at one point, murder is simply "a dropped stone falling to the lake bed with scarcely a ripple." And so it goes.

This awkward young man, desperately eager to escape his dreary hometown and philistine family in California, makes his way east to Hampden College in Vermont, a thinly disguised version of Tartt's alma mater, Bennington (a school also portrayed as a druggy paradise of self-indulgence by Tartt's classmate and mentor, the notorious Bret Easton Ellis). Because the country-bumpkin narrator is possessed of "a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs," he falls in with a rarefied group of five aesthetes who are reading the Greek classics exclusively with their even more rarefied professor, Julian Morrow. He sets the lofty tone for each class with the pitter-Pater hope that "we're all ready to leave the phenomenal world, and enter into the sublime."

Bewitched and bedazzled by his stylish new friends, Richard ascribes to them "a strange cold breath of the ancient world: they were magnificent creatures, such eyes, such hands, such looks – *sic oculus, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat*." (Tartt word-drops Latin even when she's echoing an old pop song.) Only one of the golden troupe is out of sync and out of place – Bunny Corcoran, whose real name, Edmund, is the novelist's jokey wink to the reader who remembers that Edmund Wilson's nickname was Bunny. Tartt's Bunny is a thick-headed, dyslexic, vulgar preppie – she never explains how this unlettered oaf got into Julian's class – who begins to suspect that his fellow-classicists are harboring a menacing secret, as indeed they are.

Spurred by Julian's invocations of the irrational – "To sing, to scream, to dance barefoot in the woods in the dead of night" – four of the baby Dionysians enact a Bacchanalian orgy in the woods and accidentally kill a farmer who stumbles upon their frenzied game. What troubles them about this unforeseen complication is nothing so mundane as guilt or remorse, but the fear of being found out. When Bunny suspects the truth and threatens to expose them, the adorable aesthetes lure him to a remote precipice and send him crashing to his death.

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In the remaining half of the novel, the murderers brood and fret and mumble. Stupefied by a bottomless supply of Valium, pot and cocaine, they mouth spurious, high-flown anguish that soon becomes unbearably boring. But they can't decide whether their actions were evil or just over-ebullient, and Richard disingenuously declares, "What we did was terrible, but still I don't think any of us were bad, exactly." Since Tartt's paper-doll characters are too synthetic to be worth any sympathy, he's probably right. With all its pretensions to erudition and moral seriousness, *The Secret History*, whose author comes from Mississippi, is a specimen of Southern Gothic. Like many Southern novelists, Tartt has an undeniable talent for evocative descriptions of nature and weather, but the rest of the story is all designer melodrama and exhibitionist glitz, the surefire formula for instant stardom, and the Warholian fifteen-minutes' place in the literary season.

A brutal murder is also at the heart of Rosellen Brown's *Before and After*, and like Tartt's novel, it was an immediate bestseller, with the film rights quickly snapped up. Beyond this, however, the two novels have little in common. Brown is an intelligent, thoughtful writer, of poetry as well as fiction, who is not tempted into pretension. Her new novel is a domestic tragedy about a family of recognizable human beings whose normally stable, predictably uneventful life is shattered by an act of willful savagery.

Ben and Carolyn Reiser, with their twelve-year-old daughter Judith and seventeen-year-old son Jacob, live in a small New Hampshire town, where Carolyn is a busy pediatrician and Ben is a sculptor who works at home and manages the household. At her hospital Carolyn is summoned one afternoon to examine the body of a young girl bludgeoned to death in an icy field. Horrified by the gruesomely crushed skull, Carolyn soon learns that Jacob was entangled with the girl, was seen talking to her before the body was discovered, and is obviously a strong suspect. Worse, Jacob has disappeared. When his father, hot-headed and impetuous, realizes how Jacob's absence will be construed by the police, he rushes out to his son's car, where he finds a bloodied jack and other incriminating evidence that he proceeds to destroy.

Despite the melodrama, it is clear from the start that Rosellen Brown is not manipulating a suspensefully delayed revelation about the murder but is concerned with the suffering that Jacob's crime inflicts on his family, and the ethical confusion and terror they are now forced, painfully, to confront. Relentlessly, Brown circles around some disturbing conundrums: Do parents ever really know their children? Is there any conceivable way of reconciling the conflicting demands of justice and family ties? How can a parent cope with the indisputable evidence of evil

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in a beloved child?

Brown attempts to deal with these unnerving questions by dividing the narrative among three voices, those of Ben, Carolyn, and Judith, each offering different points of view about Jacob and the murder. But the boy is not heard directly, as though to emphasize his stark and terrible difference from the others. He clings to his sullen, disquieting silence, shattering the nerves of his parents and sister, until, home on bail and awaiting trial, he tearfully blurts out his version of that fateful night; but his parents know it is less than the truth. Each of them is determined to make different use of the truth they've grasped, and their irreconcilable decisions splinter the family more gravely than ever. Ben insists, "I had no illusions. But he was my son, and my love is not provisional upon his actions or his goodness," and he refuses to testify against Jacob. Carolyn, the last of the true believers in justice, and haunted by the indelible memory of the girl's bloody skull, tells the court the truth. Yet the trial ends in a hung jury, setting Jacob free.

Unfortunately, as the antagonistic moralities clash, Brown's dramatic scheme becomes too schematic and contrived. The father's unconditional support for his son, which he dubiously regards as a form of forgiveness, is asserted over and over again, but it is never credibly demonstrated. The mother's uncompromising intransigence seems equally implausible. Only twelve-year-old Judith is allowed to speak words of wisdom instead of the exclamatory shallowness assigned to her parents, for Judith alone seems to have any awareness of the reality of evil: "I mean, aren't there people who are just plain not nice?"

In the end we are left with only an ambiguous and irresolute sense of the irreparable damage that the murder has done to all the Reisers, and a mawkish finale merely papers over the cracks, moral and psychological, that Brown has failed to confront. We don't encounter the decisive, probing intelligence this novelist brought to an earlier book, *Civil Wars*, about the post-partum depression of civil-rights militants bereft of their causes by history. Reading *Before and After*, with its considerable wealth of acute observation and social detail, we can't help feeling cheated by the equivocal ending that Brown settles for, rather than a hard-won quest for an answer to her terrible question, "If your son was a killer, what would you do?"

There is nothing irresolute about John Updike's literary imagination and the nimble ingenuities displayed in the fifteen novels he has published to date. He writes, with unfailing predictability, in perfectly poised control of mind, prose, character, and place – the place more often than not being the bedroom. But although sexual permutations and combi-

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nations play their customarily emphatic role in his new novel, *Memories of the Ford Administration*, Updike's familiar obsession with sex is all but overwhelmed this time around by an elaborate excursion into American history, both distant and near.

Gerald Ford enters the picture, to begin with, because Alfred Clayton, the narrator of the novel, has been asked to set down his memories of 1974-76 for an historical journal, and he is more than happy to oblige because his mind keeps racing back nostalgically to the mid-seventies, a time, before AIDS, when "Everything was out of the closet, every taboo broken. . . . [The] paradise of the flesh was at hand. What had been unthinkable under Eisenhower and racy under Kennedy had become, under Ford, almost compulsory." O happy days!

Alf, never Al, is a horny professor of history at Wayward, a female junior college in southern New England. Living in a grubby bachelor pad during the Ford heyday, Alf has left his wife in order to devote himself wholeheartedly – or whole-bodily – to his Perfect Mistress, Genevieve, the wife of a deconstructionist professor of English at Wayward, whose ravings about texts and anti-texts Updike skewers with parodic glee. But guilt on several counts – about his three young children, the assorted bedmates he can't keep his hands off, and his permanently unfinished magnum opus, a biography of the fifteenth American president, James Buchanan – has steadily poisoned the exhilaration of Alf's freedom.

At this point Updike mixes fact and fiction. Buchanan has been a longtime Updike passion and the subject of his only play, *Buchanan Dying*. Like the novelist, Buchanan was a native of Pennsylvania. He was Lincoln's immediate predecessor, and he has been called – unfairly, according to Updike – the dullest of American presidents. In the novel Buchanan shares the stage, in parallel and contrast, with another famously dull president, Gerald Ford, whose brief time in the White House is given a surprisingly positive assessment, mainly because, as Updike sees it, Ford held the country together, after the rupturing scandals of Watergate, by pardoning Nixon. Though he makes no attempt to deny the dullness of both presidents, Updike admiringly portrays Buchanan as a figure of incorruptible integrity who tried, but failed, to prevent the outbreak of civil war.

In this tricky juggling of past history and present sex, Updike alternates between Alf's memoir (whose star is his incorrigible penis) and the chapters of his aborted Buchanan biography, portraying his long-maligned hero as "the only bachelor President, the most elderly up to Eisenhower, the last President to wear a stock, and the last of the doughface accommodators, before the North-South war swept accom-

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modation away." Along the way, the novel also allows Updike to vent his irritation with present-day students who "have no patience with their ancestors and little interest in the erratic half-steps whereby a people effects moral change and whereby well-intentioned men of substance [read: Buchanan] might seek amid agitation and a long stasis of contending equal interests the path of least general harm."

Within the memoir, chapters of Alf's abandoned biography are interleaved with his frantic sexual shenanigans, and the historical sections, with their mocking abundance of pedantic footnotes, provide Updike with a bravura opportunity to scorn the dry-as-dust historians mired in the

> comparing of subtly disparate secondary versions of the facts . . . and sinking deeper and deeper into an exfoliating quiddity that offers no deliverance from itself, only a final vibrant indeterminacy, infinitely detailed and yet ambiguous – as unsettled, these dead facts, as if alive.

When Alf Clayton acknowledges the hopeless mediocrity of his Buchanan enterprise, he simply gives up.

Memories, clearly, is a sort of omnium-gatherum of Updike crotchets and devotions. But despite the characteristic eloquence he brings to his reflections about American history and present-day mores, this novel fails to engage us. By now Updike's anatomical scrutinies of sex have struck the same crotches so often, Alf's promiscuity is as inviting as cold oatmeal. And do we really need yet another heavy-handed satire of an academic cocktail party? Or pages filled with the titles of pop-song hits and bestsellers from the time of Gerald Ford?

What finally becomes intolerable to the reader is the tedium of Clayton's abandoned life of Buchanan, which occupies more than half the pages of the novel. Only once, amidst the tiresome regurgitation of facts and events, do Alf's efforts strike fire, as he recounts a poignant meeting in 1855 between Buchanan, then Ambassador to Britain, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, then the American Consul in Liverpool. The interplay of intelligence and anxiety between these two very different American personalities, as they meditate about the fate of their country and the forces that threaten its unity, is superbly rendered. As for the rest, it's fatally boring. No wonder Alf couldn't finish his book.

The hero of Maureen Howard's *Natural History* is Bridgeport, Connecticut, where she was born and bred in an Irish Catholic family. A once-thriving manufacturing center on Long Island Sound, Bridgeport, like many such industrial towns of New England, fell victim to blight and decay after the Second World War. In several of her novels and the

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memoir *Facts of Life*, Bridgeport has been Howard's Dublin, the native ground that has possessed her imagination with the ferocious tenacity of a demon – the demon of memory – that will never let her go. In this new, enormously ambitious and eccentric novel, Howard concentrates on yet another Irish Catholic family, the Brays, whom we first meet toward the end of the War.

Billy Bray, the father, is a swaggering county detective; his wife Nell, who "married down," is chronically worried about her teenage children, James and Catherine, and tries to exorcise her amorphous anxieties in fanatical housekeeping. James is obsessed with magic tricks and movies; Catherine is an earnest Girl Scout, miserably unsure of herself and dreamily pious. Suddenly the family romance is thrust aside by a murder (*again!*) that Billy is assigned to investigate in a nearby town. An aggressively sexy woman, whose husband is a major in the Army in Italy, has shot a young soldier. She claims the soldier followed her home from a local tavern and was plainly up to no good. Years after the murder, which relentlessly haunts the Bray children, Catherine suspects that Billy had treated himself to the sexual favors of the accused woman and made sure she was acquitted. It is never explained, however, why her father's supposed transgression plagues Catherine well into middle age.

But any attempt to convey what passes for plot in *Natural History* is doomed, for Howard has a great deal more than straightforward narrative in mind. As it develops – or rather, flits hither and yon with antic restlessness – the novel becomes a pinwheel of history: by turns an assemblage, a jigsaw puzzle, a scrapbook, a hodgepodge, a three-ring circus (the exploits of the great showman P. T. Barnum, a luminary of Bridgeport, play a prominent part in the book), a recycling bin, a screenplay, and much more. Within bits of murky suggestion and fragments of fact, we learn that James becomes a Hollywood actor. When he realizes his film career isn't going anywhere, he decides to return to Bridgeport to make a movie about the wartime murder, in which he will play the father-detective. Thus the long chapter called "Closet Drama" takes the form of a screenplay, complete with lighting and stage directions, that wanders erratically through James's movie career, marriages and children, his unrealistic expectations about the film, and his sister's opposition to the whole idea because it might expose the unsavory truth about their father.

But the display of Howard's uncontainable ingenuity in "Closet Drama" is only one segue. Midway through *Natural History*, she embarks on the most arduously daring of extravagant improvisations, an eighty-page section called "Double Entry" (as in bookkeeping, presumably because the author is totting up the debits and credits of the Bray family

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and of Bridgeport). Splitting the text literally, Howard offers, in the right-hand pages, the story of James's ill-fated movie, which he eventually abandons; his affair with a former nun turned social worker; and Catherine's return, after some catastrophic years in New York, to Bridgeport, where she becomes a famous spinner and weaver. In the left-hand pages, Howard jumbles memory and history, collective and personal, in a mad anthologist's mishmash of quotations (from Sir Thomas Browne to Walt Disney); Bridgeport lore, including the fact that the city was once the leading American manufacturer of corsets; a rummage sale of miscellaneous pop-culture Americana, old engravings, photos, and greeting cards; a tribute to crusty Jasper McLevy, the Irish Socialist roofer who was mayor of Bridgeport for many years; movies and movie houses; the collage boxes of Joseph Cornell; a lengthy detour into Walter Benjamin's thoughts about the arcades of Paris (because Bridgeport once boasted a beautiful arcade of its own); and ending with the world-shaking revelation that Robert Mitchum, no less, was born in Maureen Howard's beloved hometown.

Once we stop to catch our breath – or nudge ourselves awake – after this breakneck roller-coaster ride, we begin to guess what Howard is attempting: to defy the evanescence of memory, to confront the irrecoverability of the past in its living wholeness, to lament the irrevocable dissolution of vanished experience, yet clinging to whatever connections we can impose on the bits and pieces that have endured. Yet all these free associations remain ambiguous, irresolute, and exhausting, in part because the very shapelessness of her "evidence" is self-defeating, in larger part because of her style. Fussy and overburdened, the sentences are so clotted or fidgety that we can't find our way out of the maze. With all the brio and wit that Howard has lavished on her pursuit of lost time, she has not illuminated the past but buried it under the clutter.

In stark contrast to Maureen Howard, Susan Minot is wary of excess and at ease with the hesitations of understatement. She is a literary stylist of rare delicacy and precision, and in her new novel, *Folly*, she has attempted, with considerable daring, to convey the ambiance and mood of the old proper-Bostonian world in its own idiom, adapting the language of her characters to her purposes. Thus she underscores the intentionally old-fashioned tone of her story with the "period" device of pointed chapter headings ("A Friend Advises," "The Visitor from New York," "Some Shocking News").

Minot's first novel, *Monkeys* (1986), told a sad and elegantly wrought story about a large and lively family, on the North Shore of Boston, forced to cope with the untimely death of the mother. In *Folly*, Minot turns her glance back to the grandparents of those bereaved chil-

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dren, to recreate the stultifying upper-class world of Beacon Hill from the time of the First World War to a few years before the start of the Second.

Folly is the coming-of-age story of Lilian Eliot, the very young and pretty and woefully naive daughter of stuffy Boston parents. She has never dreamt of questioning their intransigent assumption that a "good" marriage, to someone of exactly her own class and background, is her sole purpose in life.

When we first meet Lilian, at the age of eighteen, her well-bred assent to the hidebound givens of her class and time has been shaken by the appearance at Beacon Hill tea parties of Walter Vail, a handsome and dashing soldier from New York, the foreign world these Bostonians instinctively distrust. At once excited and disconcerted by Walter's flirtatious attention, Lilian asks him home for dinner, only to have her father insist she withdraw the invitation. "I don't like the look of him," Mr. Eliot scowls, and Lilian, "a good clear Boston girl," does as she's told. Though it never seriously occurs to her to rebel, she does meet Walter surreptitiously, and thinks herself deeply in love after some furtive handholding and a chaste kiss or two. Lilian's sexual ignorance is absolute, but her confused longing is pungently clear.

After Walter goes off to fight in France, none of Lilian's cautiously ardent letters to him are answered, and she hides her bitter disappointment behind the acceptable gestures of stoic resignation. "How could she have expected to hold and to understand someone like Walter Vail?" she wonders. Since Lilian is not entirely devoid of spunky pride, she also adds, "Of course he could never have understood her either." But she wouldn't think of saying this to anyone but herself. Inevitably, Lilian fulfills her parents' agenda of respectability by marrying the right wrong man – the dull and upright (though actually eccentric) scion of an impeccable Boston family, having several children, and shedding her youthful illusions about the compatibility of passion and duty. This illusion, as Minot's title implies, is folly, though she may also be suggesting the opposite – that it is folly to discard such illusions.

"Resignation" would be an equally appropriate, if less resonant, title. For Minot's deeper purpose in this novel, beyond recapturing the diction and habits of an earlier day, is the quiet but unstinting illumination of an unremarkable woman's progress toward self-awareness, as she forces herself to accept the loss of unrealizable dreams. What Minot is writing about in *Folly* is the untraumatic but inexorable death of happiness. Although the tone of the novel is in the main too wistful and diffident, Minot allows her stylistic virtuosity freer rein in a few brilliant set pieces. One calm day at the shore, Lilian, innocent to the core, observes a cou-

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ple on a boat whose playful romp is clearly the prelude to sex, and she is stunned by their public display of desire. Years later, while her husband is recovering in an English sanitarium from a nervous breakdown, she puzzles over her life as she takes lonely walks through the dripping countryside, and the melancholy that Minot conveys with the sparest of strokes is unforgettable.

The power of such scenes makes one regret that Minot has chosen to cage her language so severely within the cadences of the time and world in which her story takes place, since this to a large extent deprives Lilian's melancholy destiny of much of its inherent poignancy. And her heroine is finally too limited in sensibility, if not in sense, too crippled by reticence to sustain the weight of mature perception she is finally asked to bear. In binding herself to the idiom and demeanor of a time so different from her own, Minot has stifled too much of her uniquely luminous lyricism, and the resulting flatness of texture is folly of a different kind.

Michael Ondaatje, who shared the Booker Prize in London last year for *The English Patient*, was born in Sri Lanka when it was still called Ceylon, and at an early age emigrated with his family to Canada, where he still lives. Several of his previous novels were set in Toronto, where two of the principal figures in his new novel – the nurse Hana and the thief Caravaggio – come from. (In fact, the two first appeared in an earlier novel of Ondaatje's, *In the Skin of a Lion*.)

In his prize-winning novel, one is immediately captivated by the figurative richness of his prose, which can move from the lapidary to the quietly measured without missing a beat. Yet the story deals not with beauty but with war and death and pain and destruction. In his narrative Ondaatje's seductive imagery serves as the counterpoint to the ruins, human and architectural, within the shattered Villa Gerolamo, near Florence. Until a few months before the story begins, in the spring of 1945, the villa had been used as an Allied field hospital. It has now been abandoned, except for four individuals who remained behind when the front moved north. They have no electricity or water, a dwindling supply of morphine, and must forage for food every day.

One is the dying English patient: "a man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. There was nothing to recognize in him." He is being care for by the young Canadian nurse Hana, who refused to leave him behind when the hospital staff departed. She in turn is being watched over by another Canadian, David Caravaggio, a thief turned Allied spy in Cairo early in the war, whose thumbs were cut off when he was captured by

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the Germans. The fourth inhabitant of the villa is Kip, a Sikh from the Punjab, trained as a sapper in the British Army, who is defusing the mines left behind in the region around the villa. Gentle and soft-voiced, Kip is marvelously adept at dismantling the dangerous objects that may blow him to pieces at any moment.

The structure of the novel is episodic, moving, in floating disconnected sequences, toward each character's private revelations. But no matter how often Ondaatje's focus shifts to the others, his attention – and theirs – is riveted on the dying man at the center of their immediate lives. After a large dose of morphine, he recounts his astonishing story: though he speaks like an Englishman and knows Britain intimately, we soon discover that he is not English at all but a mysterious Hungarian aristocrat, Count Ladislaus de Almásy, a legendary map-maker and explorer of the African deserts, a man of formidable cultivation "who knew where every Giotto was in Europe, and most of the places where a person could find convincing *trompe l'oeil*." Before the war, on an expedition in the Libyan desert, he fell in love with the high-born wife of an English colleague who tried to kill him. After war broke out, Almásy worked for the Germans in the desert campaigns of North Africa, and eventually, after a series of hair-raising escapades, his burning plane crashed in the desert, where Bedouins found him and delivered him to a British hospital.

With the extraordinary tale of heroic adventure, doomed love, and disaster, apparently based on an actual historical figure, Ondaatje weaves a meticulously researched account of desert exploration in the 1930s. As Almásy says of himself at one point, "I have always had information like a sea in me." This is true of the novelist as well, and it is all conveyed in Ondaatje's poetically hypnotic, dreamy, trance-like prose. But then, with startling abruptness, he punctures the sinuous, ruminative mood of his story with a jarring leap toward the end of the novel into political melodrama. Kip hears on his radio that an atom bomb has been dropped on Japan, and he goes berserk. Though he knows the bomb was dropped by Americans, to Kip this most ultimate and undefusable of bombs means the triumph of British imperialism. He threatens to shoot the "English" patient, screaming, "Americans, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world you're an Englishman." Against the grain of the story Ondaatje has been unfolding with such imaginative power, he shifts the register of his voice to outrage, reminding us that although he was educated in England and Canada, his deepest roots remain in the third world of colonial oppression.

One may understand why he introduced this dissonant political note

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into the lyrically suggestive fabric of the novel, but it does seem an error of literary, if not political, judgment. And beyond this clumsily intrusive episode, the larger symbolic meaning of *The English Patient* is hard to grasp. If there are hidden moral and philosophical depths to Almásy's epic saga, which the author's occasionally portentous tone suggests ("We are communal histories, communal books"), they are elusive. Perhaps the novel is in essence what at its surface it appears to be, and no more: a thrilling tale of adventure, romance, and survival, told with rare metaphoric radiance. Hardly a negligible achievement.

In a recent profile of Julian Barnes, *The New York Times* called him a chameleon, exactly the right word for this clever, mercurial writer. If we set his new novel, *The Porcupine*, alongside the earlier *Talking It Over* and *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, as well as his best-known performance in *Flaubert's Parrot*, we can take the full, astonishing measure of his mimetic versatility. Clearly his unique strength as a writer derives from his nimble ability to slip into the skin, voice, and temperament of anyone he chooses to impersonate. While *Talking It Over*, published last year, was a tediously flippant satire of sorts about a triangular romantic obsession, Barnes has now ventured into the present-day political arena – the post-Communist world of Eastern Europe. *The Porcupine* was originally published last year in Bulgaria (though the novel does not mention that country), where the translation became an instant bestseller and the deposed Bulgarian dictator, Todor Zhivkov, sent for a copy of the book to read in his prison cell. Why was the book published first in Bulgaria? According to one interviewer, Barnes "became fascinated with the plight of the upended people he met [in Bulgaria] on a book tour, and wrote *The Porcupine* with their help."

The short, spare novel opens with a demonstration that housewives have organized to protest the endemic shortages of food (and much more) in their newly democratized country. Beating their ladles and cooking spoons on pots and frying pans, the women march through the main square in a thunderous kitchen cacophony:

> There was no decline into words, for they had heard nothing but words and words and words – inedible, indigestible words – for months and months and months. They spoke with metal, though not with the metal that usually spoke on such occasions, the metal that left martyrs. . . . They argued, bellowed, demanded and reasoned without words, they pleaded and wept without words.

Watching the housewives from a nearby building is the deposed

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Communist tyrant, the foul-mouthed and wily Stoyo Petkanov, awaiting the show trial that will fill the remainder of the novel. With skillful agility, Barnes shuttles between the voice of the old monster in the dock, forever the unregenerate, unapologetic defender of hard-line Communism, and the voice of the Prosecutor General, Peter Solinsky, once a Party *apparatchik* and now an uncertain apostle of democracy who proves unequal to the task of nailing his adversary for the horrifying crimes he had committed against his countrymen.

In the course of the trial, Petkanov unleashes a venomous torrent of contemptuous abuse on the prosecutor and the new regime, though he reserves his most scurrilous obscenities for the man he loathes above all – Gorbachev, "that weak fool in the Kremlin who looked as if a bird had shat on his head," and who "couldn't even keep his own wife in line, so what chance was there of his stopping the counter-revolution once it had started?" Outside the courtroom, the housewives have been replaced by students hoisting furiously ironic placards: "Thank you for the price rises. Thank you for the food shortages. Give us ideology not bread."

What Barnes acidly attempts to show as the trial limps toward its disarrayed finale – most of the charges against Petkanov "had petered out in squabbles and forgetfulness," and he is sentenced to thirty years of internal exile, a meaningless punishment for a nonagenarian – is that the bureaucrats and leaders of the new government are just as corrupt as the Communist tyranny it replaced. The most pressing needs of the people have been met only with empty promises. The prosecutor is confounded by Petkanov's claim that the old regime at least gave people "stability and hope" but "you have only given them instability and hopelessness. A crime wave. The black market. Pornography. . . . you do not even give them sausage."

All depressingly true, of course, underscored by Julian Barnes's icy cynicism. Yet one can't help feeling that he has loaded the dice, that his pessimistic disdain toward the unsettled post-Communist world, his obsessively ironic cast of mind, have led him to simplistic and superficial judgments about the former Soviet satellites. He's much too impressed, even awed, by the brute force of Petkanov as he presents the cunning old monster, and a little too eager to sneer at the fumbling incompetence of the prosecutor. Even more dismaying is Barnes's tacit assumption that Communism may very well triumph again in the cyclical transfigurations of history: As Petkanov gloats, ". . . in *our* next jump we shall squelch the capitalists down into the mud until they expire beneath our boots." Yet all this is not analysis; it is the drama of voice and confrontation that intrigues Barnes. What he lacks is the political intelligence and experience of a Silone, an Orwell, or a Koestler. Ventriloquial virtuosity,

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however brilliantly manipulated and devised, is no substitute for their kind of authority.

Günter Grass's new novel, *The Call of the Toad*, takes the form, like so much of his work, of satirical fantasy, but beneath its wonderfully inventive facade he has some sad and deadly serious things to say, not only about the newly unified Germany but about the European scene as a whole, rife with materialism, greed, and nationalistic fanaticism. We are not allowed to forget, even as Grass makes us laugh, that in German legend the call of the toad is a harbinger of disaster. Yet this new novel is his funniest and most engaging work of fiction in years.

Set in his native Danzig-Gdansk, which he describes with his usual nostalgic affection for the city, the surrealistic story casts glaring satirical light on the post-1989 political atmosphere of Germany and the Baltic peninsula. Grass takes a dim view of Chancellor Kohl's new Germany – he was opposed to unification – and the yellow-bellied toad's croak of doom is his disenchanted symbol of foreboding about the country's future.

Since cemeteries form the background of the story, the principal figures, naturally, are an aging widow and widower, who meet on All Souls Day, the day of the dead, in 1989 just before reunification. Alexandra, a Pole whose parents settled in Gdasnk when they were expelled from Vilno after the Russians took over, is an art restorer, an expert at regilding old sculpture that has lost its gleam over the centuries. Alexander, a native of Danzig who now teaches in Germany, is an art historian whose specialty is Baroque tombstones. He was in the Hitler Jugend, she an ardent Communist until '68, but they have long since outgrown and repudiated these youthful transgressions.

As they chat, and begin to fall in love, they brood in sadness about the many Germans and Poles originally from the Danzig peninsula who were buried in foreign earth because they were shifted about in remorseless dislocation during "the century of expulsions." Then, instead of just brooding, they decide to form a Polish-German Cemetery Society that will become a Cemetery of Reconciliation, where the dead can spend eternity in their native ground. As elderly Danzigers in West Germany enthusiastically apply for burial plots in the enlarged cemetery, the Society mushrooms into big business, with a tactfully balanced (half-German, half-Polish) board of directors, large sums in the bank, computers humming and clicking, faxes whirling busily between Germany and Gdansk. The whole enterprise is Grass's mordant caricature of a united Germany and a united Europe.

Inevitably the board of directors comes up with plans for some lucrative "improvements" on the original idea: "twilight homes" on the

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Baltic for those who want to wait out their allotted time close to their eventual resting-place; hotels to accommodate the mourners; and, in the grandest scheme of all, "Bungagolf" vacation homes by the sea, for relatives and friends of the deceased, with bungalows attached to golf courses. The elderly lovers who started it all are appalled by the predatory deformation of their modest scheme, and they resign from the board.

Since the story is a comic fantasy, Grass now summons up a hilarious prescription for a better world to come, in the form of a Bengali friend of Alexander's. Mr. Chatterjee had arrived in Gdansk some years before during a gasoline shortage, and he had come up with the idea of driving tourists around in rickshaw-bicycles to replace the fuel-less taxis. As the idea caught on, it spread to polluted, traffic-jammed cities all over the world, and soon Mr. Chatterjee, with the help of numerous relatives imported from Calcutta, is manufacturing rickshaw-bikes in the once-booming shipyards of Gdansk. And at Alexander's suggestion, the bicycle bells developed in Chatterjee's workshops echo the call of the toad. As more and more of the world falls into Bengali hands, street names like Goethegass and Grunwaldzka are rechristened in honor of Rabindranath Tagore and the Bengali national hero Subhas Chandra Bose – a typical Grass irony, since Bose, as an Indian nationalist, sought to organize a pro-German legion in India during the Second World War but died in a plane crash.

Mr. Chatterjee's literally fantastic success is the embodiment of Günter Grass's sober utopian dream of a European future "free from nationalistic narrowness, no longer hemmed in by language boundaries. . . ." But of course, as Grass makes despondently clear in this novel, it is a dream now more distant and unrealizable than ever. Since this is not a comforting view, his wonderfully endearing book was not greeted in Germany with much enthusiasm. Yet *The Call of the Toad* is a wise and somber comedy, a satirical fable drenched in politics and drained of illusion, and it exuberantly reaffirms, after some years of creative drought, the inventive vitality of Günter Grass, the old pro once again at the top of his form.

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KAREN WILKIN

Matisse at MOMA

The Matisse retrospective organized by John Elderfield at the Museum of Modern Art this fall was a triumph, an illuminating, perceptively selected exhibition, sensitively installed. Close to an ideal assembly, the lavish display of paintings, sculpture, drawings, and cutouts allowed us at last to see Matisse whole. It reaffirmed his preeminence not only as colorist and draftsman, but as one of the most (perhaps *the* most) visually intelligent artists of all time and revealed him to be more complex, subtle, and unpredictable than even the most passionate of his admirers had thought. The marvelous context provided by Elderfield's selection made us feel that we were encountering the works we'd all grown up with, from MOMA's own remarkable Matisse collection, for the first time: I suspect that even the most seasoned veteran of the Modern's Matisse room will never again see "our" loose, sketchy version of *Dance* in the same way, now that we've had the chance to study it alongside of the taut ring of vermilion dancers that usually resides in Russia.

There were some gaps, of course, due chiefly to insurmountable loan restrictions or the fragility of particular works. Unfortunately, the missing pictures included several crucial to an understanding of Matisse's evolution – the startling Fauve portrait of Mme. Matisse in the plumed hat, for example, the first painting by Matisse that Gertrude and Leo Stein acquired, or *Le bonheur de vivre* (1905-06), the pastoral idyll that both sums up Matisse's Fauvist concerns and provides the source of many of his greatest figure paintings. The latter, of course, is in the devoutly uncooperative Barnes Collection, whose refusal to lend to this definitive exhibition is particularly irritating, since the entire collection is soon to go on extended loan to the National Gallery, while the Barnes's building is repaired. The Barnes's holdings from the 1920s, some of the best and most ambitious paintings of the so-called Nice Period, a triptych of fetchingly costumed women and an opalescent interior, would also have enriched the show, but all in all, there was little to be desired. The cumulative effect was exhilarating and challenging. Again and again, we were reminded of how profoundly the best art can stir us. By presenting the visual evidence in abundance and in depth, the show not only allowed us to think more deeply about Matisse, but forced us to begin to clarify what we thought about him.

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What follows are excerpts from notes that attempt to do just that.

Early Work

Interesting chiefly for intimations of the future. "Mon premier tableau" and "mon deuxième tableau," still lifes of stacked books with picturesquely tattered bindings, are conventional and unremarkable, although rather accomplished for a novice. Matisse was no virtuoso and a late starter, a twenty-year-old law clerk, veteran of only a year's part-time drawing classes at the municipal art school of a provincial French town when he began almost by accident to paint; recovering from appendicitis in June 1890, he was given a paint box by his mother and discovered a world of liberating (self-) absorption. (Within a year he abandoned law, to his father's displeasure, and went to Paris to study painting in earnest.) Yet from the start Matisse seems free of the beginner's usual difficulties with paint handling, displaying instead a respectable facility of rendering and a sophisticated touch. The stumpy *impasto* and awkward structure of slightly later works is deliberate, a declaration of the young painter's appetite for modernism.

Echoes of the Impressionists, particularly Manet and Degas, in the cluttered tabletops and picture-crammed walls of the interiors of the 1890s. Harder to account for the fuzzy surfaces and indeterminate space of a couple of vaguely expressionist, clearly northern landscapes painted on a summer trip to Brittany in 1896. (Matisse had the sense not to pursue this direction; when he turned again to landscape a few years later, it was in quite another way.) He needs the bracing structure of architecture or at least of geometry – walls, pictures, doorways, and the like – to order space and keep the picture together. The interiors, every surface covered with incident, point ahead as the landscapes do not. Matisse will prefer to spread and layer shapes across the picture instead of angling them in fictive space, while (abstracted) pattern will largely replace anecdote, or rather, anecdote will be turned into pattern, but the disciplined *horror vacuui* that presumes every millimeter of painting surface to be potentially interesting persists for the rest of his career.

Most prophetic: the moody grey interior *The Studio of Gustave Moreau* (1895, Private Collection). Matisse's future is there: the all-over pearly light, the faceless nude who stands dead center, stretching from top to bottom of the canvas, the plaster cast of the classical statue behind her, and the black-coated students seated at their easels, focused on their work. No one looks at the model or even faces her. This unassuming little picture implies palpable tension between aesthetics and reality, poses questions about how actuality can be transubstantiated into art that will fascinate Matisse for years to come. For the rest of his life as a

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painter, the interior he chooses to explore is his own studio, more often than not. The fantasized nymphs of his early years, the Arcadian personages of *Le bonheur de vivre* and *Le luxe*, the maenads of *Dance*, soon revert to frankly posed models, but the theme remains unchanged: flesh displayed not for delectation but for aesthetic scrutiny, flesh turned into image, often played against sculpture – man-made images that mediate between reality and art.

The wholly absorbed artist of Moreau's studio recurs in overt self-portraits, or, more frequently, by implication, when Matisse forces us to recapitulate mentally his intuitive decisions about picture-making. He leaves evidence of the picture's evolution, elisions, and omissions, scratching out and painting over – a record of intense, wordless decisions made in solitude. He convinces us of an absolute inevitability of structure based, paradoxically, on fleeting visual relationships that lay bare the artist's thought processes.

The most provocative of the self-portraits comes later (1918, Musée Matisse): a bourgeois gentleman in coat and tie, chunky body restating the rectangle of the picture itself, sits at an unseen easel; his extended brush touches the edge of the canvas, as though he were painting the picture we see while we watch – an intensely serious visual pun made more complex by the self-portrait's clearly being a mirror image. Mirror and painting exchange places; the viewer becomes the artist. (What are we to make of the umbrella, the prudent man's prop, hung on the washstand?) Ravishing pink floor.

Color has not yet announced itself in *The Studio of Gustave Moreau*. That will take a few more years and exposure to Signac's theories and example, but an important part of Matisse's immensely complex and ultimately mysterious iconography is stated. That's the pleasure of the early work – it allows us to watch Matisse becoming Matisse. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts' *Carmelina* (1903-04), for example, presages what is perhaps Matisse's essential preoccupation: a lifelong effort to resolve the tension between the figure as corporeal, carnal mass and the painting as an expanse of stuff on a surface. The voluptuous young woman pushes towards us "through" the surface of the canvas, boldly confrontational and alert, against tightly organized rectangles and squares that emphasize her swelling forms. The mirror conflates depth and surface, actuality and fiction, captures the artist at work (reasserting both artifice and the flat surface) and, at the same time (homage to Velázquez), shifts the viewer into the presumed space of the maker.

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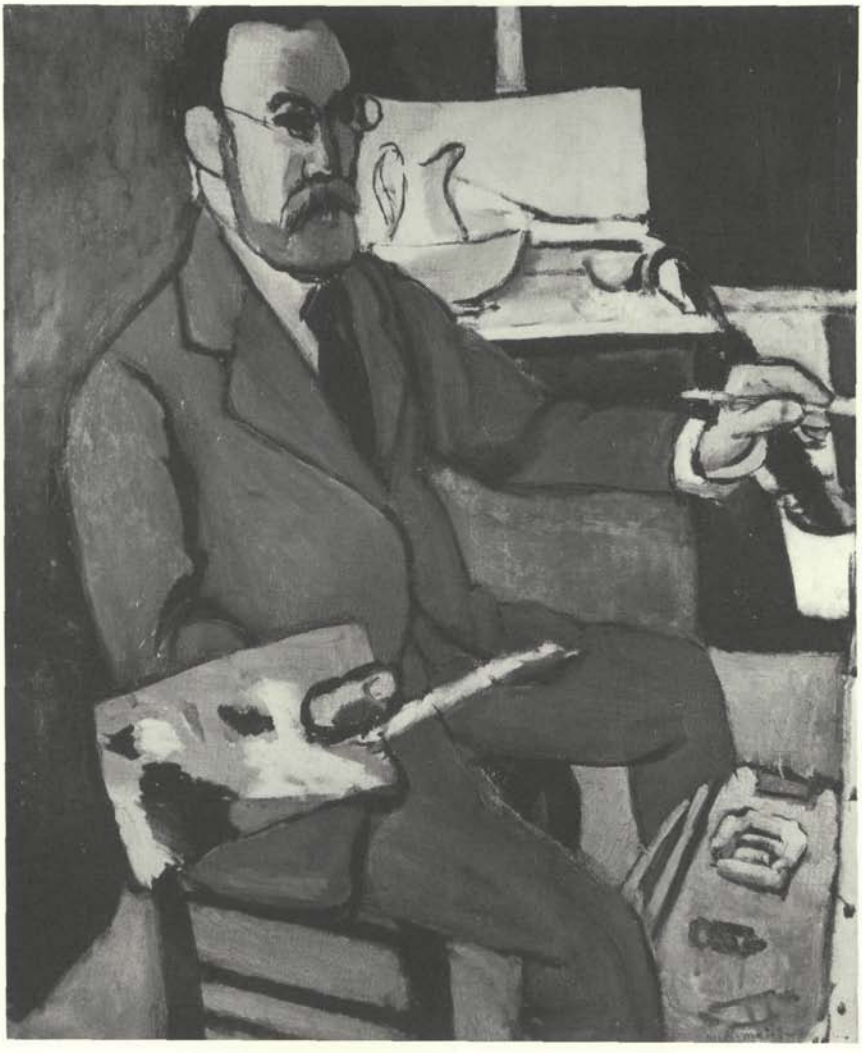

Self-Portrait (1918). Oil on canvas. 25 and 1/2 by 21 and 1/4 inches. Musée Matisse, le Cateau-Cambrésis. © 1992 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © The Museum of Modern Art.

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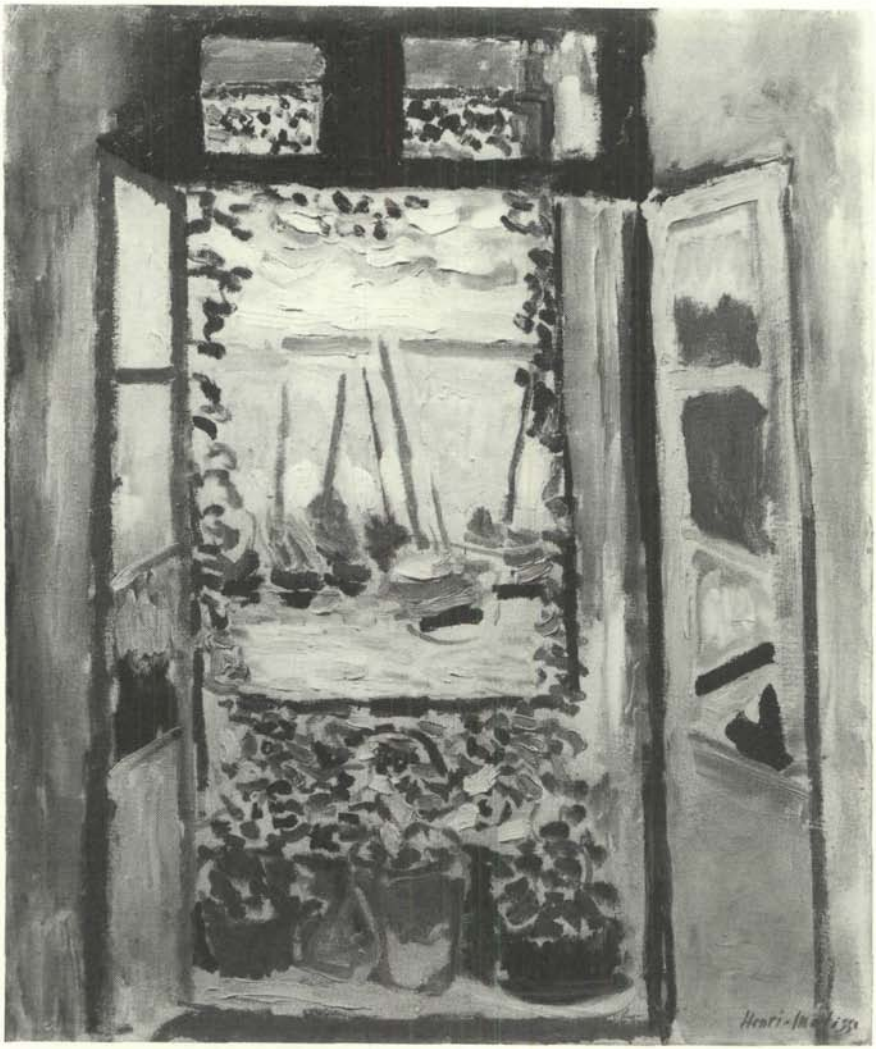

The Open Window (1905). Oil on canvas. 21 and 3/4 by 18 and 1/8 inches. Collection of Mrs. John Hay Whitney. ©1992 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. ©1992 The Museum of Modern Art.

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Fauvism

Most of the Fauvist pictures look remarkably fresh. It's still a daring thing to set apparently pure touches of color side by side with no thought of the tempering effects of traditional light and shade. Visible response to Signac's theories about color and, on trips to the south, response to a light-drenched landscape. Matisse's color heats up, becomes the building block of the painting. When he is doubtful, he leans on Cézanne, relating warm and cool color planes (however intensified the hues) with an eye to Cézanne's vibrating touches. Time of experimentation, testing of possibilities, manifest in a kind of antiphonic contest between Signac-inspired stutters of colored lines and Cézanne-inspired rock-solid structure. One extreme risks fragmenting form into unrecognizeability, the other risks inertia. In the best pictures of this period, dazzling color evokes brilliant light without depicting its effects, and this purely painted evocation of light, in turn, reveals the physicality of the world around us.

Danger: full-throttle colors can simply cancel each other out, because of uniform intensity; the desired quickening of perception disappears in an uncomfortable sense of sourness and heat. But Matisse, even at his wildest, never succumbs to this. (The same cannot be said of most of his fellow Fauves, with the exception of Dufy at the very beginning; Marquet, who is arguably not really a Fauve; and Braque, the latecomer.) Matisse resists the temptation to go right around the spectrum. He may concentrate on reds and greens, passing blues on the way, but limit yellow to a small accent only, while patches of related hues – red, orange, pink, and warm purple or blue, green, and greyed violet – are made to read as large expanses by virtue of proximity, instead of dissolving into incoherent spots. Even the most *apparently* pure hues turn out to be subtly modulated, a little "off," unnameable.

Even in the "hottest" of his 1905 Fauvist pictures, Matisse instinctively goes for the half-tones and the quarter-tones, like the marvelous neutrals of later pictures, in order to make chromatic hues more potent. The tender pinks, off-whites, and chalky, whitened viridian greens of the sublime little painting *The Open Window* (1905, Mrs. John Hay Whitney) are crucial to the sense of blazing beach light called up by the picture, as crucial as glittering orange boats and the dance of cinnabar red drawing. But what really nails the picture and most potently suggests the sensation of looking out against bright light are the touches of dark green and blue that stand for silhouetted window frame, vine, railings, and deep shadow. In many ways, this is the key work of the period, not only for its superbly orchestrated color and its radiant light, but for the meaning of its composition. The artist presents us with a chunk of plea-

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sure-producing, light-struck nature, seen from the tranquillity (and possibly, solitude) of the indoors, framed and contained like a picture within a picture.

In slightly later Fauvist works, Matisse further consolidates and mutes his color, apparently to strengthen form and structure. The pattern of swings between varying degrees of abstraction – emphasis on the stuff of painting – and seeming naturalism – evocation of the mass and space of actuality – has begun to declare itself.

1907-1917

A decade of masterpieces: great figure compositions that constitute both Matisse's homage to his chosen forebears and his exorcism of the past; frontal, iconic portraits like Egyptian statues updated; studio interiors that allow us access to the artist's private realm, a zone of "luxe, calme et volupté" conceived in terms of deep pleasure for the eye and mind. Sensuality becomes a function of sight, aesthetic experiment, a source of delight. The large figure paintings, in particular, announce Matisse's habit of working with a set of circumscribed images and ringing changes on them. Their immediate ancestors within his own work are the sensual reclining nudes, the striding flute player, and the ring of dancers of *Le bonheur de vivre*, enlarged and seen close-up. Ultimately, however, they testify to Matisse's efforts to come to terms with the painter he revered most: Cézanne.

Matisse owned and treasured a small Cézanne of three female bathers – standing, seated, and wading – that served him as a paradigm of excellence and a model for composition, and became a touchstone for his own efforts. Like Cézanne, Matisse habitually segregates the sexes in his bathers: women only in both versions of *Dance*, in both versions of *Le luxe*, and in the stunning *Bathers with a Turtle* (1908, St. Louis Art Museum); men only in *Music* (the companion of *Dance* that didn't travel from Russia) and in *Game of Bowls* (1908, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). It seems a little arbitrary – certainly not inspired by anything like Cézanne's well-known *pudeur* – but then men, clothed or unclothed, are altogether uncommon in Matisse's work. The mixed groups of *Le bonheur de vivre* are exceptions, as is the sexually overt *Nymph and Satyr* (1908-09, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). It's an odd picture that both separates and conflates male and female. At first glance, the two figures are clearly unlike: rosy flesh and blonde hair for her, ochre tones and dark hair for him. The eponymous satyr tilts forward, seemingly propelled as much by the weight of his huge hands as his desire for the fallen nymph at the bottom of the canvas, yet his forward plunge, momentarily arrested, is made urgent by the way one figure paraphrases

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the other; the satyr's shape could (will) be perfectly congruent with the nymph's shape, once he achieves his goal.

More remarkable still, the near-heraldic opposition of male and female in the astonishing *Conversation* (1908-09, 1912, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg), a picture that constantly provokes speculation about marital discord. I'm never sure why. Matisse relegates his pajama-clad self-portrait and the seated figure of his wife to opposite sides of the empyrean blue canvas, separating them by a window that opens on a blooming garden, but he links them by what he may have regarded as the most potent of the senses, sight. There's something Jamesian about the stillness of the figures, their contemplative gaze, their distance; it's as though they were caught in a moment of unspoken but significant comprehension. (Echoes of Piero della Francesca, who had greatly impressed Matisse on a recent trip to Italy?) A male friend who lives alone once declared *Conversation* to embody his idea of life as it should be lived: a sunlit garden, a wide-windowed house, leisure in the morning, a shared life. The ambiguity, of course, is what makes the picture fascinating. (That and the overwhelming, seductive color, the taut poses, the fragile surface, the evidence of thought and effort.)

Most enigmatic of the pared-down figure compositions of this period: *Bathers with a Turtle*. The seated woman on the right would tower over the others if she stood. Ferocious concentration on, of all things, a turtle – classical allusion or equivalent of whatever it is Cézanne's bathers sometimes reach for? The swelling geometry of Giotto, the contained stillness and solemnity of Piero, seen on that Italian trip, are very much on Matisse's mind. So is his colleague Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, itself a deliberate challenge to Matisse's *Le bonheur de vivre*. The landscape and the individual spaces occupied by these bathers exist by default, carved out by the viewer's willing suspension of disbelief in the otherwise unequivocal flatness of the bands of blue and green, and carved out, too, by the fullness of the bather's bodies, the embracing curves of broad pink drawing. (An echo of Rubens's transparent red line that brings flesh to life?)

Matisse quickly distances himself from his nymphs and bathers, using his pictures as the basis of other pictures, either by making alternative versions or incorporating them undisguised, cropped, or further adjusted, into other paintings. (This habit of self-quotation persists until the last years.) The Modern's version of *Dance* turns up frequently, playing a double role of anecdotal reference and metaphor. No doubt the large canvas was a conspicuous presence in Matisse's studio, but the painted figures, bodies already translated into art, function as actual models might have, but at one remove. The sculptures, themselves often derived from

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painted figures, that appear so frequently in Matisse's still lifes can, in turn, be read as metaphor piled on metaphor: flesh turned into paint, into three dimensions, and back into paint again.

Perhaps the most extreme transformation is to be found in the magnificent *Corner of the Artist's Studio* (1913, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) – the one with the striped deck chair, and the cascading plant and amphora pulsing in a way that tests the limits of vision. Space is walled off by a patterned fabric – overscaled pink curlicues on saturated blue – that we recognize from other pictures, thrown over tables and sofas, hung over screens, and generally tossed about the studio as a convenient, visually arresting prop. But in this painting, which once hung as a pendant to the second version of *Nasturtiums with "Dance"* (1912, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), the figured drapery (a deliberately chosen description) takes on a new role. Its curvilinear pink pattern on deep blue becomes an abstract surrogate for the whirling pink bodies and blue sky of *Dance*. (The amphora stands in for the vase of nasturtiums.) As if to underscore the likeness between art and object, a corner of *Le luxe* is visible, upper left.

When the process is simply one of second thoughts, of an alternate version, Matisse is equally inventive. Second versions usually bring subject matter into sharper focus. The poses of the dancers become more dynamic as their bodies arch more sharply and legs are raised higher, as though in sympathy with the increased brilliance of their color; the nymphs of *Le luxe* come closer to us, fill the canvas more fully. Matisse does something similar when he alternates between painting and sculpture, making sculptures of "painting poses"; the body's implied trajectory through space is intensified, the articulation of parts heightened.

Matisse's struggle to come to terms with Cézanne's bathers lasted most of his life. It's arguable that the cut-out blue nudes and the disembodied figures of *The Swimming Pool*, of his last years, are his final word on the subject, but he perhaps met the challenge most fully in what is surely one of his very greatest works, *Bathers by a River* (Art Institute of Chicago), which he worked on in a series of campaigns in 1909 and 1910, 1913, and 1916. Like *Bathers with a Turtle*, it is a puzzling picture. Each figure is trapped in her own vertical band, stretching from top to bottom of the canvas, like that standing model in the 1895 painting of Moreau's studio. Dense vegetation on the left, zones of black (river? memory of the waterfall at an early stage? void? light?), brushy white (wall? space?), ethereal blue (sky?). Is that a snake coming up from below? What about the headless figure second from the left, at once like the wading woman in Matisse's Cézanne and a regal seated presence? The boundaries between figure and not-figure are more fluid than usual,

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and this ambiguity of edge, along with the delicacy of modeling, the warm and cool tonal shifts that suggest female anatomy, allies the Chicago *Bathers* more closely to Cézanne in fact and in spirit than anything in Matisse's previous work. The sheer evidence of labor, the dense, brushy worked surface of the picture evokes, too, the sense of slow accretion so typical of Cézanne.

Bathers by a River is a summation of all of Matisse's preceding concerns, a momentary coming to terms with his admiration for Cézanne and a definitive response to Picasso's *Demoiselles* (and to Cubism in general). The picture points ahead, as well. Before it went to Chicago, *Bathers by a River* hung in the lobby of New York's Valentine Gallery for an extended period and had a notable effect on many postwar American painters. Robert Motherwell is the obvious example. For Matisse, too, it was a pivotal painting. He kept returning to this dislocated, existential vision of Eden, a long way from the sunny idyll of *Le bonheur de vivre*, and echoes of both these solemn, faceless goddesses and their severe, geometric world inform much of what followed: the grave dancers of the Barnes mural, the blue nudes of the cutouts, and much more, even the most sensually patterned and relaxed of Matisse's subsequent works.

So much is striking about the paintings of this decade: the layering of colors, overpainting that creates unimaginable hues of extraordinary density and brilliance, or equal intensity wrung from transparent, seemingly one-shot washes of color, casual as watercolor. Portraits distinguished at once by staggering liberties – bold scratching, overdrawing, canceling out, limbs that detach from bodies, furniture that disappears, diagrams of body dynamics superimposed on recognizeable images – and at the same time, scrupulous attention to fashion details – the cut of a dress collar, a modish hat, fetching high heels, a decoration proudly worn in a buttonhole. Why don't these portraits succumb to mere anecdote? For the same reason that even the most ordinary hotel room of the Nice Period can be the source of an inspired picture: Matisse's unfailing visual intelligence, his consummate ability to transform potential fashion-plates, predictable studio set-ups, and dispiriting interiors into visual relationships of startling lucidity.

Worth noting: Elderfield has assembled most of the paintings and sculpture that punctuate *The Red Studio* (1911, Museum of Modern Art, New York) in the show. I suppose this could be construed as a private joke of a sort, but how marvelous to be able to see for ourselves the works Matisse chose to enumerate.

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Nice Period

Some years ago, a group of sculptors were debating the relative significance of linear, drawing-like sculpture versus more volumetric, massive work. "Look," Anthony Caro said. "This pendulum can be all the way over at one extreme or at the other or anywhere in between!" Matisse, a tireless investigator of alternatives, would have agreed. He refused to restrict himself to any one mode, to a single way of putting on paint or making marks, to a single range of hues, to a single way of responding to things seen. His work ranges, within relatively short spans of time, from disembodied near-abstraction to totally convincing naturalism – and anywhere in between – sometimes in the same picture.

About the time he moved to Nice, after 1919 or so, Matisse allowed the pendulum to swing toward reference. A way of refreshing himself after the severity and economy of his work of the preceding few years or a northerner's delighted response to the pleasures of the south? From the furthest limits of modernism, Matisse began to look backward once again, reexamining his place in both inherited and chosen traditions, testing the possibilities of a startling range of predecessors from Persian painting to Classicism, from Courbet to Pissarro (and Impressionism in general); *The White Plumes* (1919, Minneapolis Institute of Art) – the solemn dark-haired girl in the fantastic beribboned, bedizened hat against a succulent red background – calls up Rubens's portraits of his buxom young wife. And so on.

The garden paradise, captured, framed, and presented as picture within picture in earlier works, is here domesticated, brought indoors. Matisse creates a fantasy world, a private artificial garden of textiles, rugs, fruit, plants, and flowers, furnished with Arab-inspired props and costumes. Just as the nominal subjects of these paintings are subsumed by a haze of delicate pattern, the aggressive ordinariness of the hotel rooms Matisse inhabited, before settling more permanently on the Riviera, is almost wholly disguised by the densely pattered fabrics with which he sets his stage. The most florid of these interiors, with their trumped-up *odalisques* and charming young ladies, are Persian miniatures enlarged and wrenched into the twentieth century. Like the Persian miniaturists, Matisse relies on a firm geometric "architecture" to hold these paintings together, creating considerable tension between the multiple touches and color shifts of the myriad patterns, and the immutable, lucid compositional scaffolding that supports them – the clarity and harmony he professed to seek perpetually. In the midst of this extreme "orientality," homage to Cézanne – the stripe-shirted boys in *Pianist and Checker Players* (1924, National Gallery, Washington), younger, more sprightly versions of the *Card Players*, but no less absorbed in play, no less aggres-

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sive in the way their bodies sculpt the space between them. Color in the Nice paintings is tempered by seaside light – tender, pale, pearly. The instability of the patterning further evokes the play of diffused but brilliant light.

Elderfield's installation, perceptive and intelligent all the way through, is particularly effective here. We are made aware of the narrowness of Matisse's confines, the limits of the hotel room where he works. We watch him change vantage points, move furniture, mentally levitate himself, play with reflections and views through a window. When he has, at last, the opportunity of more complex spaces, he revels in them, nodding even at Velázquez's celebration of the glories of fictive painted space, *Las Meninas*, with an artful disposition of drapery and a minute self-portrait reflected in a distant mirror. Mirrors or at least one particular oval mirror are everywhere in these interiors, sometimes bottomless and black – an antidote to light and pattern – other times blurring the immediate surroundings or pulling sharp images of the outside world into the hothouse studio *cum* bedroom.

Late Works

Authority, audacity, and deep pleasure coexist with anxious inquiry. Matisse's fundamental obsession persists: how to reconcile acute awareness of the world as a place of deep space populated by three-dimensional forms and equally acute awareness of the character of the surface to be painted or drawn upon. The paradigm of this opposition: the celebrated *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Ground* (1925-26, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) – a suavely modeled seated nude jammed against riotous wallpaper and sumptuous rugs. The *idea* as much as the *fact* of illusion is diagrammed by her ramrod back and taut thigh, a series of right-angle turns that carve out space as dramatically as if it had been sliced with a sculptor's tool. Matisse's largest free-standing sculpture, *Large Seated Nude*, dates from about the same time. Arms folded above her head, legs drawn up, she conflates illusion and actuality as forcefully as her painted sister, despite her unequivocal existence as a real three-dimensional object. Matisse translates Michelangelo's clenched Medici Tomb figures (which he studied closely) into an exuberant outward thrust of cleanly articulated volumes, a bold cantilever at once tense and voluptuous, illogical and completely convincing.

Late paintings: simultaneously assured, daring, and searching as Cézanne's nervous contours. Seemingly endless adjustments, erasures, cancellations, and revisions are deliberately left visible, no matter how effortless the final image appears. (A tenth-century Yoga master, I am told, exhorted his students to "put all effort into effortlessness.") Process, the

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act of painting, the struggle to recreate sensation almost made ends in themselves; Matisse's last works, the cutouts, reverse this by carrying process to new extremes of materiality.

As a group, the Vence interiors of the 1940s, Matisse's last paintings, are probably the biggest surprise of the exhibition. Relaxed, playful and tough, they reexamine ideas about surface and expanse dormant during the 1920s. Sheets of color (denser and subtler than first assumed) are overlaid with (apparently) spontaneous drawing, generously scaled calligraphy that knits together stretches of saturated, thin color. Tile patterns, wallpaper, palm fronds, philodendrons, distilled into aggressive arcs and zig-zags of line, as unpredictable and deceptively improvised as the expanses of radiant hues.

Inevitably, late Matisse invites comparison with late Picasso, and the differences are startling. None of Picasso's childish self-indulgence informs Matisse's late pictures; instead, a bearing-down on essentials, a probing and transformation of the simplest elements of picture-making. In the Vence interiors, the furnishings of a particular room become characters in a drama: a spindly-legged table and an ornate one, animal-skin rugs, a pineapple in a basket, drawings on the wall, a palm tree out the window, a preposterous chair. Each element plays its part, now expanding beyond its expected confines to charge space or pattern a shape, now sliding discreetly to the periphery. Painting is reduced to essence of color, distillation of line.

In this context the Blue Nudes look better than I expected, competing with the large decorative panels of the final years. MOMA's *Swimming Pool* (1952), with its disorienting, destabilizing play of figure and void, and *Souvenir of Oceania* (1952-53) with its wholly ambiguous evocation of tropical landscape, are the stars of the selection – not to discount *Zulma* (1950, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), a reprise of the vertical figures of Matisse's 1912-13 trip to Morocco. But it is the blue nudes and acrobats that bring to life the much-quoted statement of how cutting into color reminded Matisse of sculpture. Surprisingly, cut shapes are rarely the result of a single, triumphant sweep of the scissors. When they are, the continuous, swooping arabesque is eloquent and made more so by contrast with shapes built of overlapped fragments, "modeled" with planes of blue-painted paper the way Matisse modeled clay with his hands or sliced it to clarify form. The labored and the seemingly effortless play against one another; the spirit of painting is pitted against the spirit of sculpture. The cutouts are sculpture without the constraints of support, coherence, objectness – logical heirs to the sweeping cantilever of *Large Seated Nude*.

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Summing Up

High points along the way, too numerous to mention. Each visit brings new revelations, new cross-references, new internal correspondences. Perhaps even more impressive than individual works, potent as they are, is the overwhelming effect of that lifetime's enterprise: Matisse's total surrender to the demands of his perception and his emotion in the face of that perception. What comes through most strongly is the sense of uncompromising, pitiless, questioning visual intelligence – not of decorativeness or seductive color or even beauty, in the highest sense of the word. The tension between plasticity and a two-dimensional revelation of that plasticity, between reserve and sensuality, between innovation and reverence for tradition becomes more apparent the longer we look.

A final note: John Elderfield's catalogue essay is a persuasive guide to Matisse's private paradise and an illuminating discussion of the relationship between Picasso and Matisse, or perhaps more accurately, the relationship between *perceptions* of Matisse and Picasso. The chronology is excellent, informative, and until the long-awaited *catalogue raisonné* comes along, an invaluable tool. While the color plates, alas, are inaccurate and disappointing, the comparative material and photographs of Matisse and his world are first-rate.

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POEMS

AMY CLAMPITT

Shorebirds in Seasonal Plumage Observed Through Binoculars

To more than give names
to these random arrivals –
teeterings and dawdlings
of dunlin and turnstone,
blackbellied or golden
plover, all bound for

what may be construed as
a kind of avian Althing
out on the Thingstead,
the unroofed synagogue
of the tundra – is already
to have begun to go wrong.

What calculus, what
tuning, what unparsed
telemetry within the
retina, what overdrive
of hunger for the nightlong
daylight of the arctic,

are we voyeurs of? Our
bearings gone, we fumble
a welter of appearance,
of seasonal plumages
that go dim in winter:
these bright backs'

tweeded saffron, dark
underparts the relic
of what sibylline
descents, what harrowings?
Idiot savants, we've
brought into focus

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such constellations,
such gamuts of
errantry, the very
terms we're condemned
to try to think in
turn into a trespass.

But Adam, drawn toward
that dark underside,
its mesmerizing
circumstantial thumbprint,
would already have
been aware of this.

MARK STRAND

from *Dark Harbor*

I

Oh you can make fun of the splendors of moonlight,
But what would the human heart be if it wanted
Only the dark, nothing on earth

But the sea's ink or the rock's black shade?
On a summer night to launch yourself into the silver
Emptiness of air and look over the pale fields

At rest under the sullen stare of the moon,
And to linger in the depths of your vision and wonder
How in this whiteness what you love is past

Grief, and how in the long valley of your looking
Hope grows, and there, under the distant,
Barely perceptible fire of all the stars,

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To feel yourself wake into change, as if your change
Were immense and figured into the heavens' longing.
And yet, all you want is to rise out of the shade

Of yourself into the cooling blaze of a summer night
When the moon shines and the earth itself
Is covered and silent in the stoniness of its sleep.

II

Where is the experience that meant so much,
That carried such weight? Where is it now
If not lodged in memory, in the air of memory,

In the place that is not a place, but where
The mortal beauty of the world is stored.
Oh yes, we are busy under the moon's gaze,

Its mouth giving back a silent O of surprise
Each time we try to explain how it was,
How fleeting, breakable, expensive it was.

We are always about to take off into a future
Unencumbered, as if we could leave ourselves behind,
But of course we never do. Who can face the future,

Especially now, as a nobody with no past
To fall back on, nothing to prove one is
Like everyone else, with baby pictures

And pictures of Mom and Dad in their old-fashioned
Swimsuits on a beach somewhere in the Maritimes.
We are at work on the past to make the future

More bearable. Ah, the potential past, how it swells,
How it crowds the days before us with feelings
And postures we had dismissed until now.

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III

All afternoon I have thought how alike
Are "The Lament of the Pianos Heard in Rich Neighborhoods"
And "Piano Practice At the Academy of the Holy Angels,"

And how the girls that played are no longer here. Yet it was never
A vast music that mingled with the lusters of the room,
Nothing that would drown our desire for rest or silence.

It was just there like the source of delight –
Unblemished, unobserved – though things did not always turn out well.
As now the green leaves brood under an early snow,

And the houses are darkened by time. The sounds of summer
Have left. The purple woods, which color the distance,
Form a farewell for the monotonous autumn.

The snows have come, and the black shapes of the pianos
Are sleeping and cannot be roused, like the girls themselves
Who have gone, and the leaves, and all that was just here.

JOHN HOLLANDER

Bread-and-Butter!

Walking together for so many years
They could hold hand in hand and still avoid
What a jackhammer or a dog had done
To or on the sidewalk – such was the supple
Touch they kept in, such the ample closeness
That marked their every way of walking by
The way (and sitting in their house and lying
Down and rising up, for all that, as well)

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And what they would pass by on either side –
On each one's side – dissolved into the air,
The general air, of the phase or stage of things
They and their local walk were moving through
Until it seemed that they could not be said
To share the walk they took so much as that
The walk itself, a tall, responsible
Adult, went between them, holding both their hands

Until they happened on the unexpected
Obstacle – and whether it had leapt up
As an expanded stumbling-block too massy
And oddly-formed merely to trip over,
Or cried out silently and suddenly
In an abyss, all hands parted, they passed

He to the left
Around it, saying *Bread*
And Butter! out
Of phase and finally out
Of contact with
Some mass of palpable,
Immediate
Souvenir then, and yet
Avoiding that
Abyss of memory
The phrase's taste
Upon his uttering tongue
Could open up.
By then his hands no more
Could even feel
Anticipations of
A touch regained:
These two could not be read
As from above,
Say, as "the two of them":
Looking across
The separation now
Had made no sense
For some time now in fact
Or fiction too.

She rightward then with *Bread*
And Butter! said
Of touch and loss of touch;
Of childhood that
Had lingered with her long,
The phrase she spoke
Itself spoke; but by then
The time for hands
Laughingly to rejoin
Was gone. The gap
Between them now was all
The making of
Their walk itself; the way
She took, the way
She had been taking now
was not just hers,
Let alone part of theirs,
But merely all
The way there was. The cut
Lines on the sidewalk
Between the concrete squares
And which the games
Of childhood cut so deep
Were not the same
There on the other side.

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Only our love of closures
    Keeps us longing
For bridges, tunnels, hands
    But there was no
Common pathway ahead
    no *You that way . . .*
Ending some comedy
    as holding out
Against time, holding out
    Both hands and hope
    Only our lust
For soft connections still
    Keeps us in quest
Of some clear syntax here.
    Both, neither, said:
We this way – a confirmed
    Deferral or
Contemporary sort
    Of difference
As if it were a word

Enough, though, of such literal narratives:
They had buttered their bread and eaten it.
Now distances shall not allow our straining
Eyes to track their faint courses any more
Where only the limitations of some page
Had made their ways seem to run parallel,
And only death would lay them lower than
The concrete actualities they walked
And leave them holding hands again with dust.

DONALD HALL

"Flaccus, drive up . . ."

Flaccus, drive up from Providence to see us.
I'll buy some bargain Scotch at a New Hampshire
liquor store and we'll celebrate your new book
    and that good review

in the *New York Times*, which you'll complain about
– I don't see how – while you denounce your old friends
for their usual treacheries; but after
    two hours of kvetching,

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you'll quiet down; you'll begin to laugh. I know
you can do better for Scotch in Rhode Island
but no one there puts up with your complaining.
    We miss you. Come soon.

"O Camilla, is it . . . "

O Camilla, is it conceivable that
you feel as ardent as I do – as horny
as seven goats? Camilla, let us hurry
        out of these grossly

getting-in-the-way clothes onto a wide bed
with its covers hurled off to play skin-music
on bright sheets, slowly increasing the tempo
        until Eden comes.

EDWARD HIRSCH

Luminist Paintings at the National Gallery

Slowly the nineteenth century is turning into dusk
on Plum Island River and the Newbury marshes
where thunderstorms gather over Narragansett Bay
and the Boston wharves are tipped in flame.
Here is an exalted dwindling light going down
forever at Half Way Rock off the Marblehead shore,
at Norman's Woe and Camel's Hump, Vermont,
on the western ledge of Brace's Rock.

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I suppose there is something strained
and oracular in these incandescent vistas
and glowing atmospherics, these salt rivers
and seashores masquerading as the letter S
("The Sun, Serene, Sinks into the Slumberous Sea"),
the tides of Time rendered in magentas
and mauves, fiery violets and sharp new pangs
of red for rainy seasons in the tropics.

What is luminism but silence at Tongue mountain,
a beacon shining off Mt. Desert Island,
reflections on Mirror Lake? It is melodramatic
coasts and marshlands, bleeding hillsides
and a dark radiance staining the canvas.
It is not light but a painting of light,
an exhibition of the body of light, a suffused
celestial presence, a void of wind and sea.

How far can our famous innocence carry us?
We are like torches at nightfall flaring up
and burning out under a streaked, transparent glass.
Crossing a bare common for the thousandth time
in snow puddles, at dusk, under a clouded sky,
Emerson said, "I have enjoyed a perfect
exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear."
I suppose there is always something suspect

and naive in American raids on grandeur,
and yet I like these local negotiations
between day and night, water, shore, and sky,
space and time. I like these intimate atoms
of color – cool, palpable, planar – that make me
think of towering bells in autumn
and organs booming in hometown churches,
schooners at evening lumbering across the bay.

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GLYN MAXWELL

Flood Before and After

It reeled across the North, to the extent
that even Northerners said 'This is North!'
and what would you have said, to see a sky

threatening the children with great change?
Extraordinary clouds! Spectaculars!
There was the Dimden family, in their barn.

And long, quite vertical rain, the three horizons
hunched, different formulations, browns
and oranges. Then the unlucky Greens

running with their sons to find their sons.
The scarecrow and the crow, they did okay,
getting dark together, but unfrightened.

Fists of clouds! Genii of glamour!
Not to mention thunders, not again!
There stand the Dimdens, safe and sad.

The Greens have found their sons! Now for their daughters.
But out goes the lightning, giant's fork
into a mound of chili, steaming there

and where's it gone? Into the open mouth,
barn and all, flavours and seasonings!
Cuddle in the rain, old favourites.

There goes a Noah, borrowing a plank.
A little slow to move, we thought. It ends
with tangles, the new rivers, and the sunshine

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formally requesting a rainbow. Granted.
The creaking and excusing back to work.
A valuable man was lost in it.

That was in the paper, with the picture.
All the Northern correspondents went
reading to the telephones, all cold,

which brought the dry onlookers from the South,
gaspers, whistlers, an ambassador
and leading lights to mingle with the hurt.

The clouds were diplomats of the same kind,
edging over to exonerate
and praise. And then the royal son arrived,

helicoptered down on a flat field,
glancing up at the sky through the whuz of blades,
attending to the worried with a joke.

Hell, I don't know what – we were all cold.
The landscape looked an archipelago.
The Dimdens finally twigged, the Greens were found

beating the Blooms at rummy, in a cave.
All were interviewed and had lost all.
All saluted when the helicopter rose.

Only some came up the knoll with us
to check our options. Only two of those
saw, as I did, Noah's tiny boat

scarcely moving on the edge of sight
below the line, and only I'd admit
the crow and the scarecrow were rowing it.

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But work

After either truth, 'For seven days
he did nothing but work' and 'All the week
he did nothing at all but sat and stared'

he went about, talked about like that,
in one enormous jumping cherry hat,
and wondered at those words. That he had done

nothing or nothing but work were real wonders
and he began, as I am doing now,
to come apart, being either man,

dealing with his hand of days
in either way, shocking himself with both
blacknesses of work and the drilled holes

of sitting, staring days, and it was these
ciphers, these airs that would begin
to look like the real stars.

MARTHA COLLINS

Down the Road

You think Food and you're fed.
You think Sleep and you disappear.
You wake and you're everywhere.

Then someone points *You, there,*
and off you go, in your yellow
slicker and red rubber boots,

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down the road but do not cross,
do not go past Susan's house, do not
talk to strangers, feed the dog.

Just this morning sun filled
my scrunched nose, snow was good
to eat, I ran ahead.

But *road* is already down
the road, two-car dream, house
machine, on/off is what it knows,

and down the road the road ends
at another road, in a field,
in mid-air, the freeway years

ago in California, or this year,
when the road fell on the road.
Love your country, go to church,

but down the road the road ends
are tied in a knot that only
a child can undo. That's

where you come in, you
of the *everywhere*, but also
you of the here and there,

eating crumbs that lead
to the table, coiling string
on your fingers, keeping time.

I slept over at Susan's house.
I slept over again but now I wake
in the nimble shadow that is

your hands and there we are.
The car starts, we're in it,
but only the road is passing by.

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GAIL MAZUR

Lilacs on Brattle Street

On the brick sidewalk, pale clusters
of purple stars, picked carelessly
from nineteenth-century yards
by rootless flirtatious students,
tossed away, darkening, after a brief fling
with nature and the city's literary past . . .

Brattle Street. "Tory Row." This afternoon,
I could almost think nothing's changed –
clouds of May cherry blossoms, pink dogwood,
the mellow blown tulips – so peaceful,
Longfellow himself might be strolling here,
lost in Dante, *nel mezzo del cammin. . . .*
or Margaret Fuller, her father's only son,
breaking from studies in Greek and Latin,
not yet awakened to love, not yet drowned . . .

A small boy tears past me, his arms full
of lavender plunder, lilacs he's bringing home
for his mother. I like his face
on which little but joy is written,
yet I have to invent a darkness in it,
as if, moments ago, he was dragging
his sneakered feet, desperate to forget
what his teacher said, something about Chernobyl.
She'd pointed to it on the roll-down Hammond map.
He was swept for the first time by the question,
What if nothing lasts?

I make this innocent boy, this thief,
think my thoughts about nuclear ash
blowing across Kiev, across our ancestors.
I see him in the stunned classroom, terror
that passes when the bell rings, but we know
it will return now, over and over,
the too-bright light, eye-widening
what if –

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what if everything in his world that matters
were colorless, empty, gone
like the wooden synagogues of Poland,
everything – the Victorian schoolhouse,
its airy unfair cage of gerbils; the 5 & 10
where he buys his models; his sister,
his sister waiting for him now on the front steps;
the houseplant his mother named for him yesterday
while she watered it – "begonia" – its pink flowers
in the front window beside the gray cat
watching for him, too, planted there,
we think, since morning, since he left for school –
reliable, wily;
and his room upstairs,
his Marvel comics, his painted bookcase,
the plastic dinosaurs lined up on its shelves
like disguised lead soldiers – the fierce
triceratops, the mastodon, the inchling
woolly mammoth – replicas he loves from the set
his grandfather *May his soul rest in peace*
sent him last year . . .

LES MURRAY

Kimberley Brief

With modern transport, everywhere you go
the whole world is an archipelago,
each place an island in a void of travel.
In our case, cloud obscured the continent's whole gravel
of infinite dot-painting, as we overflew zones and degrees
toward the great island of the Kimberleys.
It was dusk when we slanted into Broome
to be checked in, each with a bungalow for a room.

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Town of bougainvillea, of turmeric dust, of tin
geometric solids that people run tourist shops in,
of pastels and lattice, of ghosts with dented heads
and porthole eyes, whose boats recline on beds
of tidal concentrate, to resurrect, if ever, when aquamarine
re-engorges the mangroves, and raw Romance has been,
when a recent Shire President was Mr. Kimberley Male
and pearls shower upward through shops like inverse hail.

In that town restrained from lovingly demolishing its past
I saw fewer brown faces than when I'd been there last,
Malay Afghans, Chinese Aborigines, or Philippine Celts,
and Euro Australians, with hind paws stuck in their belts
and a bumless tail dressed as two moleskin legs from there down
must have hopped to Derby for the races, or moved out of town,
but the sun off Cable Beach, entering the ocean's hold
ran its broad cable hot with incoming traffic of gold.

Deeper levels were anchored with many-fathomed ropes
knotted with old murder and world-be-my-oyster hopes;
jerseyed grandsons of the neck-chained took marks, or kicked a goal
while a great painter of theirs sat in jail for jumping parole
and it was dry months till some mouthless cave-coloured one
would don cloudy low-pressure dress and dance a cyclone –
Why tell this in verse? For travelling, your reasons can be
the prosiest prose. As a tourist, though, you come for the poetry.

Slot-car racing in a groove deep-cut by a grader through dust
I asked my mate *"This low bush we're in, this pubic forest:*
is it all picture, or all detail?" "You could die in it, resolving that."
Our bus seemed to climb all day, the land was so flat.
The Kimberley was once mooted as a National Home for the Jews,
in the late Thirties. Even then, they felt constrained to refuse.
In Palestine were their Dreamings, in Vilna and Krakow their roots.
Midmorning, then, we came to an Aboriginal kibbutz,

with real children, barefoot ones. The square we weren't to stray from
contained a mud-brick church we hated to come away from,
since inside were Mosaic scale-armour and celestial wicket gates,
the table of God, His kitchen, His dresser of plates
each a lucent pearl shell; above that, His concrete city, rose-pearled
with all the arch-shells' mundane sides facing out of the world
and their lustre cupped our way. And over all, full span,
hung the Reader among characters: God, sacrificed to man.

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The Stations had been painted by Sisters from Mainz and Bavaria,
the sort who seized children to educate and ran hands-on leprosaria
when leprosy was AIDS, but less pitied. The Carpenter who
taught Oscar Wilde, and millions before him too,
that the opposite of a platitude is more likely true
moves through sheets of action that are echoing with energy, like Munch
but often stronger, till he tilts like a plank off a shed
in hue and rigour, with one arm hinged hanging, dead

and helplessly ready to stand all death on its head.
Dampier peninsula, named for a pirate who hated the place,
had no kangaroos to stand with handcuffed paws and belly-face,
no emus, no sheep, but featureless termite men instead.
We lunched under tamarinds planted by some Macassar crew
to refresh them when harvesting the sea, as most peoples there do.
If Australia is part of Asia, as some fervently declare,
why were we never kamponged, paddied, pagoda'd from there?

It was Europe's blood-watering let Asian Australia take root.
We had sights of more sites, and bought tourist stuff as the tribute
such trips vaguely exact. I had wanted to visit Tunnel Creek
and Wolf Creek crater, where huge iron in full spacefall
treated Earth like tar; one mile-wide ripple forms a ring-wall.
Those will have to wait. Instead, our hospitable week
next saw us in Kununurra where, Israel again, the dry earth
is irrigated to supply winter vegie markets, in this case Perth.

There we cruised on a river perennially full to the brim,
that old Outback longing; we heard of Stumpy Michael, of Kim,
and where we landed to buy stuff a square-bearded crow
perturbed our spirits with its wire-prisoned frantic *Hello*.
And far trees meshed antennae along the ridgelines, like ants;
the sunset, like all the light, was factual; I felt underdreamt.
Chemicals were imprinted with catfish, spouses, cormorants –
how naturally random recording edges into contempt.

Kind people explained about Development and suicide;
which race drank indoors, and which is seen drunk outside.
The lost sounded not dissimilar, whatever their skin.
I saw no squalour. Some houses looked lived around, some in.
It was still four-wheel-drive country. Artifacts and lean beef
were the style, not muddied tractors. No pub was called the Sheaf.
Then past inverted trees and umber hills with slopes of pale cowhair
we were off to Purnúlulu, the Bungles, to camp two nights there.

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En route, we were shown the creamy shitwood tree,
named long ago by stockmen, as it would be,
and near it, two such ringers, men with the remote eyes
of those who meet with scant gentleness, who live on supplies,
whose little screw horses perform superbly or get shot –
the sort who took Australia, and founded the good life we've got.
And then we reached the Bungles, a massif of roofless caves
made of rock-brittle, like brick skin after a lifetime's shaves.

Chasms munched underfoot. Long palm trees from primeval
Australia, where we live, emplumed niches near the sky
as if lowered in there, by their rotors. In a retrieval
of hobohood that night, I spread my sleeping bag atop dry
grass whose merciless needled spirochaetes of seed
still infest my clothes. I, sex slave to a weed!
On the massif's other side, striped towers of profiteroles
hid chasms with similar stained flumes and limestone swallow-holes.

Over one of these quivered water-shine from a pool long void.
Gaudí palisades spoke of wet-seasons by which a near-destroyed
otherworld, that long ago was this world, is dissolving.
As we left, tourist dust was a pillar by day, revolving,
and we heard of the crazed hunter, here on human-safari some years ago
who shot several, and died riddled. Rangers told campers that although
guns were outlawed in the park, they were okay for self-protection
and an arsenal emerged: revolvers, assault rifles, a black-powder gun . . .

Next day on the Dam road, unaccountable miles from water,
a snake-bird showed its prongs to two eagles planning its slaughter.
We netted it, in a jacket. Next monster to devour it was our bus.
It lay in cloth-dark, intensely alive, without fuss,
as we visited the Durack homestead on the ridge where that'd found
Ararat when their green castle wasn't blown away, but drowned.
In one room leaned a real spear, not tourist junk, but straitly thin,
tense as if in slung flight, like the legend-shaft Windinbin.

There too hung a kite-framed headdress, coloured in concentric twine:
that's true Kimberley, and can't be bought, unless you are McAlpine.
At the dam, we reimmersed the darter bird, who instantly sounded
(with no notion of cross-species help, it seemed unastounded)
and then we regarded the nine-times-Sydney-Harbour expanse
where nine tipsy Joe Lynches might embrace deep mischance
and ferry the wrecked moonlight down a diminishing spoor
of bubbles between nine Empires' chained men-o'-war –

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that is, if it weren't desert water, that has not softened
its stark mountain poundage, nor summoned any arbour,
villa, folly or hamlet to make its shores less bare:
merely warnings about crocodiles, by whom you can be leather-coffined.
Our guide showed us the green Ord River in its downstream pose
and the gold kapok flower, and the veal-coloured Kimberley rose.
We learned later about diamonds and their blue clay arcana
and we learned of the scrub cattle who found someone's marijuana.

In Broome, I didn't revisit, as they're now a guidebook draw,
the headstones of Japanese who once trod the sea floor
sending its clamped crockery skywards out of floury detail
and hung nightly in shark-heaven to still their blood's crippling ale.
Every cemetery's a fleet of keels. We checked out the Zoo
with its high wired cupola, walked the catwalk in full view
of many endangered species – and beyond them, more and more
dying distinctive towns, looking up in hopes of rescue.

Land of pearl and plain, where just one man now goes for baroque
and is mostly liked for it; of seeping pink gorges and smoke,
where whites run black shops since, as my aunt found at Bunyah,
deny credit to your own poor and your world will shun you,
where great films await making, perhaps not for Southern television
(most Oz comedy dismays us, we agreed, with its terrible derision),
where bush balladry has set rock hard, with decrepitations,
as a means to silence poetry, and a finger stuck up at denigrations,

since most modern writing sounds like a war against love.
We were grateful for our week, and experiences that brought
bottom lip to top teeth, in that f that betokens thought.
The true sign of division, in that land of the boab tree,
lies perhaps between those who must produce and those who must be.
But the nacre of cloud had formed over the earth again, above,
and the rust and dents were gone that say the Kimberleys are
a splendid door ripped off the Gondwanaland car.

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FICTION

SERGEI DOVLATOV

Superfluous Man

To Aleksandr Gross, irrepressible Russian déclassé, superfluous man and disturber of the peace

As usual, we had run out of alcohol, and, as usual, I had expected it. But we had no problems at all with the food. How could we? What problems could there by as long as Sevastyanov had successfully cut an ordinary apple into sixty-four parts? I remember we had gone out twice for another bottle. Then some girls from the ice ballet showed up. Shablinsky kept staring at them and saying, "We'll melt that ice. . . . We'll melt that ice. . . ."

Finally it was my turn to go for vodka. Shablinsky went with me. When we returned the girls were gone.

Shablinsky said, "Those broads are smarter than I thought. They ate, they drank, they retreated."

I remember Tofki Aliyev was saying, "At home I have a piano, an alcove, silver spoons. . . . Paintings from almost as far back as the Renaissance . . . and – no sex at all. But in the garage I've got all sorts of trash, old tires, a tarpaulin. . . . I laid half the student body of a choreography college on that tarp. That's the only place they agreed to do it – in the garage! They thought the furnishings were appropriate."

Shablinsky stood up and said, "Let's go to Tallinn."

"Right on," I said. It was all the same to me. All the more so as the girls had split.

Shablinsky worked for the newspaper *Soviet Estonia*. He'd been in Leningrad a week. Now he was taking advantage of the situation to return home. We ducked into a store. Bottles bulged from our pockets. I was wearing a summer shirt and sneakers. I did not even have my passport. In ten minutes a Volga pulled up. Behind the wheel was a morose fellow whom Shablinsky called Grishanya. Grishanya said nothing the whole way. He would not take a drink of vodka. I even wondered if Shablinsky had ever seen him before. We sped quickly through the seedy northwest outskirts of Leningrad. Then came the monotonous suburbs,

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listless greenery and slow-moving rivers. At a railroad crossing Grishanya put on the brakes, flung open the door, and headed for the bushes. He busily unbuttoned his fly en route, like a man who scored convention.

"How come he's so sullen?" I asked.

Shablinksy replied, "He's not sullen. He's under investigation. I believe it has something to do with bribery."

"What'd he do, offer someone a bribe?"

"Don't idealize Grisha. Grisha didn't give; he took. He has nothing to lose. Soon they'll arrest him." Grishanya emerged from the bushes. We continued on our way. The landscape changed after Narva. Nature looked less disorderly. The houses were tidier and more severe. Shablinsky took a drink and dozed. I kept thinking, why? Where am I going – and for what? What lies ahead? And how stupid life is! . . . Finally we approached Tallinn, passed through faceless brick suburbs. Then something Gothic flashed by. And suddenly we were in Raekoja Square. A bottle clinked under the seat. The car stopped. Shablinsky woke up.

"Well, we're home," he said.

I got out of the car. Neon lights cast their glow on the pavement. The flat facades of the buildings stood in bold relief from the darkness. The cityscape recalled the illustrations in Hans Christian Andersen. Shablinsky stuck out his hand.

"Call me."

I did not understand.

"My wife will worry," he said.

Shablinsky had been working for the newspaper a long time. He did not take his role as Party functionary too much to heart. And he even managed to preserve a certain charm. It has been my observation that it is rather difficult to eradicate charm. Much more difficult than, say, reason, principles, or convictions. Sometimes decades of Party work prove to be insufficient. Honor, maybe, will have utterly vanished, but charm remains. I even knew – if you can believe it – a charming prison warden in Mordovia. . . . In short, Shablinsky was a normal person. And if he had to do something nasty, he was not unnecessarily zealous about it. I almost made friends with him.

"Call me," he repeated.

I had been in Tallinn before. But that was on a business trip – with all the necessary papers, money, and hotel room. And most important, with the sense of a rational if banal goal. But why had I come this time? I'd been fired by my editors. I had sixteen rubles in my pocket. The only guy I knew here was hurrying off to his wife. And Grisha . . . was about to be arrested. But just then Shablinsky thought of something.

"I've got an idea!" he said. "Why don't you look up Busch? Tell

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him I sent you. Busch will be glad to put you up."

"Who's Busch?'

"Busch is a really fantastic character. You'll see for yourself. I think you'll like him. His telephone number is four-oh-oh-one-one."

We said good-bye. Grishanya sat in the car. He lowered the car window and stuck out his head.

"Do you need some money?" he asked.

I did need money. Needed it bad. All the same I said, "Thanks. I'm okay." I added, "Good luck."

"Ciao," said Grishanya.

I had been fired from my job at the beginning of October. No real reason. I was kicked out, as they say, for the sum total of my faults. I had taken too many liberties. In journalism, everybody has permission to do one particular thing – one thing that violates the principles of socialist morality. For instance, one person's allowed to drink. Another, to behave like a hooligan. A third, to tell political jokes. A fourth, to be a Jew. A fifth, to be non-Party. A sixth, to lead a promiscuous life. And so on. But each person, I repeat, is allowed just one thing. You can't be both a Jew and a drunk, or both a hooligan and a non-Party member.

I was fatally all-inclusive. That is, I'd gradually reached the point where I allowed myself everything. I drank, behaved badly, and openly displayed my ideological myopia. Besides that, I wasn't a Party member and was even part Jewish. And finally, my home-life was becoming more and more complicated. So they fired me. They called me to a Party committee meeting and said, "Enough! Don't forget – journalism is the leading edge of the ideological front. And at the front, the most important thing is discipline. And that's what you completely lack. Is that clear?"

"More or less."

"We're going to give you a chance to reform. Go to a factory. Ask for heavy physical work. Become a worker-correspondent. Write about real life. . . ."

I could stand this no longer. "Yes," I said, "and for writing about real life you'd shoot me down without a trial!"

Since then I hadn't had a regular job. I edited the memoirs of some general. Wrote garbage for the radio. Put together a brochure, "How Communists Subdued the Tundra." Then I wrote house book reviews for magazines. Worked anonymously for television. In other words, I became a freelance writer. And finally here I was in Tallinn. I spotted a telephone booth next to the souvenir shop. I remembered the digits: four-oh-oh-one-one. I dialed the number.

A woman's voice answered, "I'm listening!" (Only it came out, "I'm wistening.") "I'm wistening, dahwing!"

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I asked if I could speak with Erik Busch.

"He's not here," she almost shouted. "And I'm really getting worried. He gave me his word he wouldn't be out late. But come over anyway. We'll get along fine."

The woman spelled out her address in a clear voice and explained how to get there. The tiny Estonian trolley car rocked and swayed around the curves. In twenty minutes I was in Kadriorg. I had no trouble finding the log house, half in ruins. The door was opened by a woman of about fifty, very thin, with pale, bluish hair. The lace on her lilac peignoir reached all the way down to her golden Arabian slippers. Her face was heavily powdered, and her cheeks burned with some kind of chemical glow. She might have been the female lead in a provincial operetta.

"Erik's home," she said. "Come in."

I had never in my life seen such monstrous disarray. The dining table was piled high with dirty dishes. Strips of greenish wallpaper had come loose and hung down to the floor. A thick layer of newspapers covered the torn rug. A Siamese cat bounded around the room. Empty bottles were lined up by the door. A man of about thirty got up from the ravaged couch. He had the dark, masculine face of an American movie star. A carnation was stuck in the lapel of his good-quality imported jacket. His shoes glistened. Against the background of his rubbish-filled house, Erik Busch looked like a visitor from outer space. We exchanged greetings. I felt awkward and uncertain as I explained to him what my problem was.

Busch smiled and suddenly began to speak poetically: "Enter, O midnight guest! All in our house is yours. And the coffee pot is boiling."

"Take some sweet rolls," interrupted the woman, Galina.

Busch stopped her with a sweeping gesture: "Let chaos reign! There are worse misfortunes! Here rules only freedom – my motto, my obsession, my ideal!"

I made out as though all this were normal. What else could I do? Leave the place at one in the morning? Or call an ambulance, maybe? Anyway, straightforward insanity isn't the worst thing in the world. As I've gotten older, I've come to regard it as almost normal. While being normal has become somehow unnatural. A normal man had just deserted me in a strange city. While an abnormal one was offering me coffee, friendship, and his food. I replied with self-conscious sincerity, "To be your guest is a compliment immense. With all my heart I thank you for this haven. Now I have found a place where I can live in peace. . . ."

Then we drank coffee and ate rolls with jam. The Siamese cat jumped on my head. Galina played an Offenbach record. We went to bed around two.

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I lived with Busch and Galina for three weeks I liked them more with each passing day – although both were totally schizophrenic. Eric Busch came from a very respectable family. His father was a doctor of science and a professor of mathematics in Riga. His mother directed one of the departments in a state fabric institute. Busch had despised both from the age of seven. By some miracle he was a nonconformist and anti-Soviet almost from birth. He called his parents "Stakhanovites."

On finishing school, Busch left Riga. For over a year he worked on a trawler. Then he became a boardwalk photographer for a time. Next he registered as a correspondence student in the Leningrad Institute of Culture. Upon completing his studies he became a journalist. You'd think a profession like that would be totally unsuitable for a man of his attitudes. Indeed, Busch wasn't just a critic of the existing order; he rejected historical reality itself. Especially the victory over Fascist Germany. He maintained that there was no such thing as free medical care. He expressed doubt concerning our supremacy in space. After three shots of vodka he would shout, "Gagarin never flew into space! Titov never flew! All Soviet rockets are just huge tin cans full of clay! . . ."

You'd think a man like that would never find a place in Soviet journalism. But that's the very profession he chose. He was an indissoluble blend of dedicated nonconformism and total unscrupulousness. Sometimes that happens. You could see elements of German expressionism in Busch's writing style. One of his articles began like this: "The hour of stardom had arrived for the great horned cattle. The participants in the veterinarians' conference took up their duties. Smelling of milk and manure, the speakers took turns, one after the other. . . ."

At first Busch worked for a provincial newspaper. But life in the sticks soon bored him. He was too large a personality for a small northern town. He had moved to Tallinn two years before I met him. And moved in with a woman rather older than himself. He seemed fated to attract older women – evidently for his poverty, his good looks, his sarcastic humor, and, above all, for his complete lack of character. In the course of two years Busch seduced four older women. Galina Arkadyevna was the fifth – and his favorite. The others had all retained a feeling of gratitude and admiration for Busch. Evil tongues called Busch an Alphonse. But this was unjust. In his love for older women, Busch was guided by the most altruistic motives. He graciously permitted them to drown themselves in belated, bittersweet emotions.

Legends began to build up around Busch. He was continually making history. Once, late at night, he was walking across Kadriorg, when three men approached him. One of them demanded rudely, "Gimme a light!"

What does a normal person do in such a situation? There are three

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more or less reasonable possibilities. Fearlessly and imperturbably hold out your lit cigarette to the hooligan. Quickly pass by or, better, run like hell. Or finally, knock out the nearest one and beat a fast retreat. Busch chose the most nonstandard, most self-destructive possibility. In reply to the crude request, he elegantly demanded, "What does that mean, 'Gimme!'? Have you and I drunk *Bruderschaft* together?!"

It would have been better if he had spoken in poetry. He might then have been taken for a dangerous madman. As it was, they beat him half to death. Probably the hooligans had been enraged by the mysterious word *Bruderschaft*. As he lost consciousness, Busch whispered, "Be happy, you peasants. I see in your faces the nasty triumph of the flesh!"

He spent a week in the hospital. He had broken ribs and a dislocated thumb. And he was left with a romantic scar on his forehead. . . .

Busch worked at *Soviet Estonia*. For a year and a half he had been kept on as a part-time correspondent. There had been talk about giving him a permanent position. The editor-in-chief would smile whenever he glanced in Busch's direction. The full-time personnel got along well with him – especially the older women. They would whisper and blush whenever they saw him. An official position meant a lot, especially in a republic newspaper. First of all, stable wages. And a multitude of social advantages besides. Finally, a notorious degree of personal impunity – the most important gift the regime can offer to those who have entered the Party *nomenklatura*. Busch waited impatiently for his permanent assignment. I want to say again that he had a dual personality. Rebellion coexisted peacefully in his heart with a complete absence of all principles. Busch would say, "In order to overthrow the regime, I must become one of its pillars. And then the whole structure will begin to disintegrate. . . ."

The seventh of November was drawing near. The newspaper editor called Busch into his office and said, "It has been decided, Ernst Leopoldovich, to give you a responsible assignment. Get a pass from the secretariat. Go to the commercial shipping port. Talk with several Western sea captains. Pick out the one who's most sympathetic to socialist ideals and ask him all sorts of questions. Try to get some more or less appropriate answers. In other words, interview him. It's desirable that this seaman should congratulate us on the sixty-third anniversary of our October Revolution. This does not mean he has to shout political slogans. Not at all. A restrained, respectful felicitation will be fine. That's all we need from you. Got it?"

"Got it," answered Busch.

"Remember, it has to be a Western captain. A Swede, an Englishman, or a Norwegian – a typical representative of the capitalist

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system. But still sympathetic to the Soviet regime."

"I'll find one," declared Busch. "Such types exist. I remember once in Khabarovsk I talked for hours with a sailor in the Royal Swiss Navy. He was one of us, constantly quoted Lenin. . . ."

The editor raised one eyebrow, fell to thinking, and said reproachfully, "In Switzerland, comrade Busch, there is no sea, no king – and no Royal Swiss Navy. You must be confused."

"What do you mean, no sea?" asked Busch in astonishment. "Just what do you think they have there?"

"Dry land," replied the editor.

"Quite so," said Busch, not yielding. "Interesting. Very interesting . . . . And don't they have any lakes there? Famous Swiss lakes?!"

"There are lakes," the editor agreed dolefully. "But no Royal Swiss Navy. . . . I see you're just pulling my leg," he concluded. "But please be more serious. As you well know, we're dealing here with your future permanent position. This assignment will decide much. Good luck to you."

The port area of Tallinn is about a twenty-minute ride from the center of town. The selected ship captain met Busch at the gangplank. He was a typical old salt – lean, red-faced, with the profile of an eagle. His name was Paul Rudi. The captain invited Busch into his cabin. He spoke Russian tolerably well. He preferred French cognac.

"This is Cordon Bleu," he said. "I recommend it. Two hundred marks a bottle."

Soon realizing he was getting drunk, Busch posed a question: "When do you cast off?"

"Tomorrow at 11:30."

This meant there was no great need to follow the plan. On the eve of departure, the captain could be made to say whatever Busch wanted him to say. Who could verify it? The conversation continued in an atmosphere of simplicity and frankness.

"You like women?" asked the captain.

"Hell, yes. Only my Louisa has no idea of it. I love women, booze, and money. You love money?"

"I forget. What does it look like?"

Busch kept drinking and the captain kept up. The cabin swam in the smoke from American cigarettes. Hawaiian music drifted in from some nearby radio. The conversation grew ever more frank.

"If you only knew," said the journalist, "how loathsome everything has become to me! I want to defect from this goddamned country!"

"I understand," agreed the captain.

"No, I don't think you can. For you, Paul, freedom is like the air itself! You don't even notice it. You just breathe it. Only a fish cast

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upon dry land could understand me."

"I understand," said the captain. "But there's a way out. You're a German. You can emigrate to West Germany."

"Theoretically, that's possible. But practically, no. True, my father's a Russified German from Courland. And my mother's from Poland. But both have been in the Party since 1936. Both are Stakhanovites, true servants of the regime. They'd never sign the necessary papers."

"I understand," insisted the captain. "But there's another way out. Join the merchant marine, become a sailor. Somehow get an exit visa. And then, when you land in some Western port, run. Ask for asylum."

"That's fiction. I have a bad record. They'll never give me a visa. I've already tried, begged. . . . In short, I've had it. I'm doomed to a slow death."

"I understand. . . . But I could hide you on the *Edelweiss*. But it's risky. If something happened, you'd be sentenced as a traitor. . . ."

By this time Busch was totally drunk. He was making speeches: "He who battles the regime is not free. Nor is he who conquers fear. Only he who knows no fear is free. Freedom is a function of the organism. This is something you'll never understand, Paul! Because you were *born* free, free as a bird!"

"I understand," replied the captain.

Around midnight, Busch walked down the gangplank. Now and then he would half turn around and raise his fist: "Die rote front!" And then he'd spread apart his first two fingers: "Victory!"

The captain, full of understanding, followed him with his eyes. The next day Busch appeared at the office. He was excited, but sober. He passed around smooth-tasting cigarettes. A Parker fountain pen peeped from his breast pocket. Busch gave his manuscript to the typists. It had a long, beautiful title: "I Shall Return to Taste Again That Good Rye Bread." The article began as follows:

> I found Captain Paul Rudi in the engine room. The merchant ship *Edelweiss* was preparing to sail. The worn-out machinery required extra attention. "The boss cares only about profit," complained the captain. "I've advised him a dozen times to replace the cylinders. I'm afraid they'll crack on the open sea. But the boss just travels around in his yacht. And here we fry like poor devils in hell . . ."

The ending went like this:

> The captain put his arm around my shoulder: "Remember, friend!

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> Freedom is like the air. You breathe freedom and never notice it. . . . The Soviet people cannot understand this – because they were born free, like birds! Only a fish cast up on the shore could understand me. . . . And therefore I shall return! I shall return to taste again that good rye bread! The fragrant bread of freedom, equality, and brotherhood!"

"Not bad," said the editor. "Lively, convincing. Only one thing bothers me – did he really say anything close to this?"

Busch was astonished. "What else could he have said?"

"Well, yes, of course," said the editor, retreating.

The article was published. The next day Busch was called into the editor's office. Sitting there was a man Busch did not know, about fifty years old. His face expressed simultaneously both complete indifference and intense concentration. The editor had retreated to the shadows. The unknown person, for all his inexpressiveness, seemed to fill the entire room.

The man looked at Busch, then said, barely audibly, "Tell your story."

Busch replied, irritated, "About what? To whom? In general, forgive me, with whom do I have the honor?"

The answer was short, as though printed on a dotted line: "About your meeting. To me. Sorokin. Colonel Sorokin."

Having named his rank, the Colonel fell silent, as if he'd lost all his strength. Something told Busch to obey. He began to recite the content of his article about Captain Rudi. The captain listened inattentively.

Busch lamely ended his speech: "Where are you now, Paul? Whither art thou blown by the winds of distant wanderings? Where are you now, my foreign friend?!"

"In jail," replied the Colonel unexpectedly. He slapped the table with a newspaper, as though killing a fly, and then spoke carefully, enunciating each word: "Paul Rudi is in prison. We arrested him as a traitor to his country. His real surname is Rütti. He's a fugitive Estonian. He's been sailing for the West German fleet. This was his first trip to Estonia. We've been waiting for him for four years."

The Colonel turned to the editor: "Out!"

The Colonel turned to Busch. "What do you have to say?"

"I'm thunderstruck! Words fail me!"

"As they say, a discrepancy has come to light."

But Busch held to his earlier version. "I wrote everything as it happened. I had no inkling of the former life of Captain Rudi. I took him to be a progressive, intelligent foreigner."

"All right," said the Colonel. "Let's say that's how it was. But all

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the same, this incident can prove only unpleasant for you. *Extremely* unpleasant. A stain on your journalistic reputation. I would even say – an ideological error. A failure of vigilance. You'll have to do something."

"What exactly?"

"I have an idea. Would you be willing to help us? In return, we'd be able to recommend you for a permanent position."

"In the KGB?" asked Busch.

"What do you mean, in the KGB? In the newspaper *Soviet Estonia.* You've wanted a permanent position here for a long time. And we have the power to speed things up. The day and hour depend on you."

Busch pricked up his ears. Colonel Sorokin continued: "You could make a deposition that would be of interest to us."

"What sort – "

"Concerning Captain Rudi. Testify that he wanted you to. . . . That he wanted to use you. . . . That is, with respect to sexual perversion. . . ."

"What?!" Busch raised himself from his chair.

"Calm down!"

"But what do you take me for?! I never dreamed that the KGB would use such methods!"

The Colonel's eyes flashed like razor blades. He grew red in the face and threw back his shoulders. "Please, not so loud. You'd do well to think about this carefully. Your entire future is at stake here."

But at this point Busch straightened *his* shoulders. He slowly took a pack of American cigarettes from his pocket. He lit up with a Ronson. Then, very calmly, he declared: "Your suggestion is immoral. It goes against my moral principles. That's all I need – to be some homosexual's object of desire! In short, I reject your proposition. Sexual perversion is not my cup of tea! Would you like me to write that he got me drunk? That, by the way, is not very noble either."

"So then," said the Colonel. "It's quite clear. I'm afraid you're going to lose out."

"But is it actually possible to win against the KGB?" Busch roared with laughter.

With that the conversation ended, and the Colonel left. But at the door he turned and unexpectedly said, "You're a better man than I thought."

"Colonel," replied Busch, "don't lose your sense of style."

The newspaper fired him. Maybe Sorokin's doing. Or more likely, the editor did it on his own. Once again Busch had to rely on older women for his daily maintenance. Although in fact his situation hadn't really changed all that much. It was at this time that Busch became ac-

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quainted with Galina Arkayevna. She appeared in essence out of nowhere – perhaps in keeping with the laws of the conservation of matter. In fact, she was not legally a citizen. Galina was the widow of a famous Estonian revolutionary, practically in the same league as Kingiseppa. She'd been given some sort of pension.

Busch made her acquaintance in romantic circumstances. To wit, on the shore of a pond. In the very center of Kadriorg is a small shaded pond. An alley of linden trees winds around it. Tame squirrels jump about in the grass. Black swans swim near the shore. How they came to be here no one knows. On the other hand, everyone knows that Estonians love animals. Someone had built a little plywood box for the swans. Visitors to Kadriorg threw them bread.

One May evening Busch was sitting on the grass by the pond. He had run out of cigarettes. It was his third day without any money. He had spent the previous night in a deserted newspaper kiosk. Thoughts tumbled through his head in a jerky and restless staccato, like telegrams: "Food. . . . Cigarettes. . . . Place to live. . . . No job. . . . Shameful to turn to parents. . . . Unthinkable. . . ." When and where had he eaten last? He recalled two pieces of bread in a self-service snackbar. Then, a sour apple stolen from someone's garden. A vanilla cookie found on the road. A green tomato discovered in the kiosk. The swans slipped over the water like two huge black bouquets. They got their food without visible exertion. Once a minute they would abruptly drop their small fine heads, on their curved necks, into the water. . . . Busch thought about food. His thoughts became more and more succinct: "Swan. . . . Bird. . . . Game. . . ." Before long Busch had broken out in a kind of atavistic, nervous trembling. His eyes glittered with the reflections of primordial cave fires. He froze, like a setter in a swamp, released from his urban captivity. By ten o'clock it would be completely dark. Seizing one of the tame birds would take only a minute. A plucked swan could easily pass for a goose. And with a whole goose, Busch would survive. He would be a welcome guest in any company. He became transfigured. In the depths of his soul sounded the hunter's horn. He felt the firmness of his unshaven chin. A prehistoric strength awakened in him.

And then a miracle occurred. On the shore of the pond appeared a woman past middle age. That is, fair game, whose scent Busch detected from a vast distance away. The black swans would never know who had saved their lives. The woman was shapely and beautiful. Butterflies danced about her head. Her diaphanous, powder-blue dress caressed the grass. In her hands she held a book, which she pressed to her breast as if it were a missal. The farsighted Busch easily read the title: *Akhmatova. Poetry*. In a strong though somewhat indistinct baritone Busch began to

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recite:

They're on the wing, already flying,
Words of freedom and of love,
While I abide here in alarm,
With lips as cold as ice.

The woman slowed her step. She held her hands to her temples. Her book, fluttering its pages, fell to the grass. Busch continued:

Beyond is a world abundant
Like sweet and scalded wine . . .
My knowing was on fire
From a fragrant burning wind.

The woman was silent. Her face expressed confusion and terror (if terror can be ardent and joyful). Then, lowering her eyes, she quietly recalled the lines:

But soon the scanty birches
Will brush against the panes,
While roses plait a crimson wreath
And voices echo from afar.

Busch stood up. "You like Akhmatova?"

"I know all her poetry by heart," answered the woman.

"What a coincidence! I do too. . . . And flowers? Do you like flowers?"

"They're my great weakness! And birds? How do you feel about birds?"

Busch threw a glance at the black swans, paused, and recited:

O seagull, circling in the sky
And robin red-breast fluttering by . . .
O dear heart! Would I were a bird
So I might from your hands be fed.

"Are you a poet?" asked the woman.

"I write a few lines now and then," replied Busch modestly. It was getting chilly. The shadows from the linden trees grew longer. The wa-

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ter no longer glistened. Twilight had come.

"Would you like some coffee?" asked the woman. "My place is nearby."

"Forgive me," said Busch, extremely interested, "But do you happen to have any sausage?"

Her answer was like crystal: "I have all that a lonely heart might need."

★ ★ ★

I stayed with Busch and Galina for three weeks. Those were strange days, filled with madness. Morning often began with quiet, anxious singing by Galina in a child's voice, accompanied by Busch in his low nasal baritone. Sometimes they would dance in the kitchen, each humming his own tune. Over tea, Galina would declare, "Call me Verochka today. And tomorrow, Fire-Bird." In the afternoon, she would often make telephone calls. She would dial a number at random. Having reached someone, she would say affectionately, "Today something pleasant and unexpected will happen to you." Or, "Beware of a woman with a cherry on her hat."

Galina could foretell the future. She told me, for example, while gazing at some small colored beads, "You'll end your days somewhere in Brazil." (Back then, in 1975, I just laughed. But now I'm almost positive she'll prove right.) And so the days passed. My sixteen rubles disappeared quickly. Galina's pension was enough for only eight days. Busch and I had to look for work. Suddenly I saw a notice posted: "Stokers needed."

"Perfect," Busch said. "It's just what I need. It's time for me to plunge into the depths of real life. To get in touch with my roots. Get closer to nature! Closer to the simple man! To undiluted natural life! Down with all metaphysics and transcendence! Long live the hammer and the anvil!"

Galina interjected shyly, "Erika, you don't have the strength for that kind of work!"

Busch gave her an angry look, and she fell silent.

The boiler house was a squat, dismal building at the foot of a gigantic smokestack. Heaps of coal were piled at the door. There were shovels lying around and two overturned wheelbarrows. Inside, a young man stood holding a heavy poker. Red flames writhed inside the furnaces. The young man squinted, averting his face.

"Hi," said Busch.

"Hullo," replied the stoker. "Are you guys new?"

"We came about the ad."

"Glad to meet you. My name's Oleg."

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We told him our names.

"Go to the dispatcher's office," said Oleg. "See Tsurikov."

In the dispatcher's booth, with its iron door, the noise of the boilers was deafening. On a dented table lay schedules and work sheets. Overhead hung a cheap loudspeaker. On a narrow cot slept a man in a soldier's uniform. A man wearing a jockey cap was working at the table. Noticing us, he raised his head. "You new?" Then he stood up and shook hands with us. "Tsurikov, chief dispatcher. Have a seat."

I noticed that the former soldier was awake. "Khud," he said tersely, introducing himself.

"We need people," said the dispatcher. "The work is easy. Come with me."

We went down some rickety stairs. Khud followed. Oleg waved at us, as if we were old friends. We stopped near the boiler on the left – so close that I could feel the intense heat.

"At the beginning of the shift," said Tsurikov, "You have to lay in the coal. I advise you not to fill the wheelbarrow to the top – it'll tip over. Before you leave, clean the grates and remove the clinkers. The work schedule is simple – twenty-four hours on, three days off. Pay is a hundred and fifty."

Tsurikov took us over to our new colleagues and said, "I hope you'll get along. Our workers are quite original. Olezhka, for example, is a Buddhist – a follower of the Zen school. He's searching for tranquillity in the monastery of his own heart. Khud here is a painter – left-wing of the international avant-garde. He works in the tradition of metaphysical synthesis. He primarily paints consumer packaging – boxes, jars, and cans."

"I call my cycle 'Morbid Truths'," explained Khud in a whisper, red with embarrassment.

Tsurikov went on: "As for me, I'm just an ordinary guy. In my spare time I study music theory. By the way, what do you think of Britten's polytonal superimpositions?"

Busch had remained silent until then. But now his face suddenly became all distorted. "Let's get out of here," he snarled.

Tsurikov and his coworkers stared at us in dismay. We went outside. Busch burst out angrily: "That's not a boilerhouse. It's some goddamned Sorbonne! Here I was, dreaming of plunging into the depths of real life. Becoming stronger morally and physically. Getting in touch with my roots. And what do I find here?! A bunch of Zen Buddhists and metaphysicians! With their fucking polytonal superimpositions! In other words, let's go home!"

Galina met us with joyful tears. Three more days went by. Galina sold several books to a used bookstore. I went around to all the edito-

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rial offices in Tallinn. I arranged some freelance jobs. I interviewed a metalworker. Wrote a story on an industrial exposition. I got Shablinsky to lend me twenty-five rubles until I was paid. The possibility of death due to hunger receded.

As it turned out, I was a huge success. If in Leningrad I had been considered an ordinary journalist, here I was almost a coryphaeus. I was given responsible assignments. I reviewed new books and plays, wrote a daily column under the rubric, "Another Opinion," composed feuilletons. And the feuilleton, as we all know, is the newspaper genre in shortest supply. In brief, I moved ahead fast. They began to invite me to editorial meetings. And, a month later, to management parties. My stories were talked about by the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party. By that time, I had long since left Busch and Galina's place. My editors had gotten me a room on Tompi Street, following which they upgraded me to permanent staff. The editor told me, "You have a fantastic sense of humor. I know many of your aphorisms by heart. For instance, 'When the brave are silent, the cowardly hold their tongues'."

The atmosphere at that time was relatively liberal, especially in the Baltic area. Also, my impertinent style was both considered and clever. One of my friends referred to it as "respectful familiarity." By this time I was making two hundred rubles a month. I even managed to pay a little alimony. My new friends were of the expected sort – young writers, artists, scholars, physicians. They were highly regarded people earning good salaries. We went to theaters and restaurants together, traveled out to the islands. In short, we led the kind of life appropriate to the creative intelligentsia. Busch was not envious of my success. On the contrary, he was enthusiastic. "Way to go, old man! We must get our people into key government posts!"

I loaned him money. Once I paid a twenty-ruble tab for him at the Mündi Bar. That is to say, I did what I could for him. As for Busch himself, he was determined not to give in to the system. I swear I did not avoid him. It was just that we no longer ran in the same circles. I did, however, manage to arrange for him to be taken on again as a part-time reporter. Needless to say, he was not given any assignments that involved politics. He wrote human-interest stories, pieces on sports and cultural events. I tried to praise each of his stories at the editorial meetings. Around this time, he began to look rather seedy. His trousers bagged at the knees, and his jacket needed cleaning. But the older women (and there are a lot of them in any editorial office) still blushed in painful confusion whenever Busch walked by – a sure indication that his power came from within and not from external details. He conducted himself correctly and modestly in the editorial office. To his su-

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periors he simply nodded wordlessly. With the rank and file reporters, he would exchange bits of news. He paid compliments to the women. . . .

People in the *nomenklatura* system of the Party have one attractive attribute. They don't hold grudges – if only because they're lazy. They lack the energy for really zealous vengefulness. They don't have the enthusiasm for genuine malice. Over the course of many well-fed years, their feelings have been dulled to the level of mere condescension. Their thoughts are so feeble that at times they resemble kindness. The editor of *Soviet Estonia* was a kind-hearted, decent person, at least until he was forced to issue cruel and malicious instructions. A decent person, as we all know, is one who takes no pleasure in doing a repulsive thing.

Anyway, Busch was published. At first his pieces were edited with special care. Then it became clear that he had changed, matured. His stories had greater breadth and depth and dealt with more significant topics. Three or four of his articles caused a mild sensation. Against the background of all the local run-of-the-mill journalists, Busch stood out. In December the editor spoke again about granting Busch permanent status. And all the older women on the Local Committee stood up for him. Shablinsky and I actively campaigned for him. At one meeting I said, "It is essential to make full use of Busch's talents. Otherwise, we will be pushing him toward the slippery road of dissidence."

The rehabilitation of Busch took on the character of an ideological test. The editor-in-chief, smiling, kept his eye on him. His fate could be decided in the very near future. New Year's approached. We were getting ready for the traditional office party. Work finished early that day. The part-time people were told not to leave. The editor called Busch in and said, "I hope we'll see each other this evening. I have some pleasant news to tell you."

People wandered up and down the corridors. A few went home to change clothes. Busch showed up in a fashionable imported suit. His patent-leather shoes gleamed. His shirt was so new that it crackled.

"You look superb," I said to him.

Busch smiled, embarrassed. "Yesterday Galina sold her teeth. She took two platinum crowns to the jeweler's and bought me this entire outfit. How could I ever abandon her after this?!"

We sat down in the large composition room. The final preparations were being made. Everyone was talking loudly, smoking, laughing. Busch sternly held himself in check. He sat in an armchair by the window. He took down a book from the shelf. He lost himself in reading. The book was called *Problems in Orthography and Punctuation.*

Finally, everyone was invited to the table. The editor waited for complete silence, then said: "My friends! Another year has now passed, a

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year filled with dedicated labor. We truly have something to remember. We've had our sorrows and our joys. Our successes and our failures. But all in all, I wish to say, the newspaper has accomplished significant things. More and more we're publishing serious, striking, and profound material. And we are making fewer and fewer mistakes. I am convinced that in the coming year we'll work even more harmoniously and cohesively. Today I got a telephone call from the Central Committee. Ivan Gustavovich Käbin sends you his congratulations. Permit me to join him from the depths of my heart. Happy New Year, my friends!"

Then came a whole series of toasts. We drank to the editor-in-chief and to the director of the Secretariat. And to those humblest of workers – the copyreaders and typists. To the temporary reporters and to the worker-correspondents. Someone mentioned political vigilance. Someone else suggested starting up a soccer team. The office informer, Igor Gaspl, called for comradeship. Mishka Shablinsky offered a toast to our charming women. The room filled with smoke. People drifted toward the corners with their wine glasses. The food melted away. Lyuba Torshina, from the local-news department, tried to get everyone to sing. Fima Bykover paid off all his debts. And then Hilda, the cleaning woman, made her appearance. It was time to leave the building.

"Ten more minutes," said the editor, and he personally handed Hilda a glass of champagne.

Then Zoyka Semyonovna, the editor's wife, appeared at the door – holding a huge German silver tray filled with trembling cups of coffee. Until that moment Busch had been sitting motionless. He had placed his wine glass on the lid of the record-player. On his knees lay the open reference book. Now he stood up. Smiling broadly, he walked over to Zoyka Semyonovna. And suddenly he let loose a stream of words. Then, with a mighty kick from one of his patent-leather shoes, he knocked the tray out of the stunned woman's hands. An uproar filled the room. The people who'd been scalded gave out piercing yelps. Lyuba Torshina screamed, then fainted. Four part-time reporters grabbed Busch by the arms. He did not resist. A blissful smile was frozen on his face. Someone had already called the police; someone else, an ambulance.

Three days later, Busch was examined by a psychiatric commission. They found him completely sane. So he was tried for hooliganism. He got two years – suspended on condition of good behavior. It was also helpful that the editor did not demand more severe punishment. That is, Busch got off easy. Of course, he had to give up any idea of working as a journalist now. I did not see him for a month. I had gone to Leningrad to straighten out my family affairs. When I got back, I called him, but his telephone was out of order. However, I did not forget him. I hoped to run into him downtown some time. And finally I did. He

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was standing near the showroom window of a photographer's studio. He had half a French roll in his hand. Everything indicated that he was not working. I suggested we stop in at the Kungla – a bar close by.

We checked our coats, went up to the second floor, and sat down by the window. I wanted to know what had happened to him – what had caused his bizarre outburst at the office party. Was it a nervous breakdown? Was he losing his faculties? Busch started to talk about it himself. "You've got to understand, old fellow. All those people at the newspaper are jackals. . . ."

Then he corrected himself. "Except for you and Shablinsky and four of those pathetic older women. In other words, the pigs are in the majority. And then came that stupid part. And all those obscene conversations. And I had to sit there and wait for that fat-assed editor to do me the honors. And then this bow-legged Zoyka pops up with her tray. We all wanted to do the same thing – kick the tray right out of her fucking hands. And suddenly I understood that my moment of decision had arrived. Now we would know – was I a knight, as Galina thinks, or a piece of shit, as everyone else maintains? So I stood up and took a step forward. . . ."

"How is Galina?" I asked.

"Okay," he said. "She had an operation . . . female trouble."

We went downstairs. After that we seldom saw each other I was busy at the newspaper. And I was getting a collection of stories ready for publication. Once I ran into Busch at the hippodrome. He looked completely down and out. He asked me to lend him a little money, thanked me, and rushed off to buy a bottle. I couldn't wait and left. In the summer they sent me to a Bulgarian film festival. This was my first foreign assignment – a sign of my political trustworthiness and an obvious testimony to my loyalty. On my return I heard a shattering story.

Tallinn had been celebrating November 7th. People carried banners and portraits of leaders. There was band music. The police kept order. Everyone was in high spirits. It was a real holiday. Busch was there with the marchers. He was even carrying a placard on a wooden stake. It looked like a snow shovel. Painted on it in green gouache was the bold line, "A STERN REBUFF TO THE ENEMIES OF WORLD IMPERIALISM." Busch had carried this placard all the way from Kadriorg to the piano factory. And only there, finally, did the police catch on. "Who are these enemies of world imperialism? And who's supposed to get this stern rebuff?'

Busch did not resist. They put him into a black sedan and took him to Pagara Street. Within three minutes he was being interrogated by General Pork himself. He answered all the questions calmly and succinctly. He categorically refused to admit any guilt. He said everything

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that happened was a misunderstanding, a mistake, or absent-mindedness. The General talked with Busch for an hour and a half. For the most part he was very correct, but at times he would unexpectedly raise his voice. After addressing Busch politely as Ernst Leopoldovich, he would suddenly shout, "I'll shoot you, you dog!"

In the end Busch got bored with trying to exonerate himself. He asked for a pencil and paper. The general, sighing with relief, handed him a fountain pen: "A frank confession could reduce your punishment."

Busch gazed out the window for a minute. Then he smiled and, in an elegant sprawling hand, wrote:

Statement

1. I express my feeling of deep concern for the fate of the Baptist Christians of the Baltic and Transcaucasian regions.

2. I call upon American intelligence to react swiftly to the abuse of civil liberties by the Kremlin.

3. I demand the right of unimpeded emigration to my historic homeland – the Federal Republic of Germany.

Ernst Busch, prisoner of conscience.

The general read the statement and dropped it into a waste basket. He decided to employ an old and trusted trick. He abruptly got to his feet and left without a word. He returned in forty minutes. What he saw shocked him. Busch was sleeping peacefully, his head on a pile of legal papers. The general would remember this later. "Oh, the things that have happened in this office! People have cut open their veins. Burned notebooks in the ashtray. Tried to throw themselves out of the window. But falling asleep! That's a first!"

Busch was taken to a psychiatric hospital. What had happened seemed to the General a clear symptom of mental illness. And perhaps he was not far from the truth. Busch was released after six months. Around the same time, my life was changing, too. It's difficult to recall how it started. Once or twice I said something out of line. I got into an argument with Gaspl, who was high up in the Party. Once I showed up drunk at a meeting of the Central Committee. At a conference of Estonian writers, I attacked my good friend Lippo.

To make a career in journalism, you have to have an endless store of energy. To mark time or to rest means to capitulate. Obviously I was not cut out for this work. I had skidded to a halt at a certain level, and that was it. They remembered that I didn't have a Tallinn permit. They

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found out I was part Jewish. And of course my association with Busch did little for my reputation. Furthermore, there were some political disturbances in Tallinn at the time. A group of dissidents had approached Waldheim with petitions demanding democratization and self-determination. Meleshko, head of housekeeping, said of the editors: "They should look to their own bosses. One of them up there is a Hymie."

I was an excellent choice for repression. So they fired me. At the same time, production of my almost-ready collection of stories was halted at the printer's and the copies destroyed. All of this just to be able to report to the Kremlin bosses that "measures have been taken"! Estonian liberalism, such as it was, was coming to an end. I was relieved of full-time status. They recommended I leave for "personal reasons." They advised me to become a "worker-reporter." I refused. It was time for me to go to Leningrad. I was packing my things at the apartment on Tompi Street, when suddenly the phone rang. I recognized Busch's voice right away. "Wait for me, old man. I'm coming right over. That is, I'm walking, don't have a kopeck. But I'm bringing you a valuable gift."

I went out for wine. In about forty minutes Busch showed up. He looked better than he had six months earlier. I asked me how things were going.

"So-so," he replied. He said they were keeping him on the register at the psychiatric hospital. They also took him regularly to the KGB. Then he brightened up and, lowering his voice, said, "Here's a souvenir to remember me by."

He unbuttoned his jacket and took from inside his shirt a piece of paper folded in four. He handed it to me with a smile of self-satisfaction.

"What's this?" I asked.

"A wall newspaper."

"Where from?"

"Local KGB headquarters. Look at the name of it – *Shield and Sword*. There's tons of interesting stuff in it. Some sergeant is being denounced for drunkenness. There's an article on money dealers. And here's some poetry about hooligans: A young stilyaga/ Took a bottle/ To an army vet./ Took it to his head,/ That is – and now the vet/ Has bled to death. What do you think?"

Then he told me how he'd managed to get hold of it.

"That subnormal Sorokin called me in. He starts up with his idiotic talk. I refute all of his arguments with quotations from Marx. Sorokin goes out, leaving me alone in his pederastic office. I think to myself – what should I steal for Seryoga, for old times' sake? I see the news sheet on a closet door. I grab it and stick it under my shirt. I bestow it on

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you now as a souvenir. . . ."

"Let's burn it," I said. "Send it to the devil and out of harm's way."

"Okay," agreed Busch.

We tore the paper to pieces and burned it in the wash basin. I was running late. I called a taxi. Busch went with me to the train station. On the platform he took my hand.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "How can I help you?"

"I don't need a thing," I said. I embraced him and got on the train. Busch stood alone on the platform. I forgot to mention how short he was. I waved to him. In response, he raised his fist (*Die rote Front!*) and then opened two fingers (*Victory!*). The train began to move.

I've been living in America for over five years now. My wife and daughter are with me. When she bought her last pair of jeans, Katya walked on them for forty minutes, then cut holes in the knees.

Not long ago in Brooklyn, a fellow hollered at me on the street. I peered at him and recognized Grishanya – the guy who had driven me from Leningrad to Tallinn. We went to the nearest restaurant. Grishanya told me he'd served only six months of his sentence and then succeeded in bribing someone. They let him go.

"If you take, you must also know how to give," said Grishanya philosophically.

I asked him how Busch was.

"I don't know," he said. "But Shablinsky was appointed director of the Secretariat."

We agreed to call each other. But I never got around to it. Nor did he. A month ago, I read something about Captain Rudi in the paper. After he'd served four years in Mordovia, some organization intervened for him. He got an early release. He's living in Hamburg now.

I asked everyone I could think of about Busch. According to some reports, he was in prison. According to others, he married the widow of the Minister of Fisheries. Both stories seem plausible. And both make me feel wretched. Where is he now – handsome lover and dissident, schizophrenic, hero and poet, disturber of the peace – Ernst Leopoldovich Busch?!

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY DONALD M. FIENE

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LYDIA DAVIS

Old Mother and the Grouch

"Meet the sourpuss," says the Grouch to their friends.

"Oh, shut up," says Old Mother.

The Grouch and Old Mother are playing Scrabble. The Grouch makes a play.

"Ten points," he says. He is disgusted.

He is angry becuase Old Mother is winning early in the game and because she has drawn all the *S*'s and blanks. He says it is easy to win if you get all the *S*'s and blanks. "I think you marked the backs," he says. She says a blank tile doesn't have a back.

Now he is angry because she has made the word *qua*. He says *qua* is not English. He says they should both make good, familiar words like the words he has made – *bonnet, realm* and *weave* – but instead she sits in her nasty corner making *aw, eh, fa, ess*, and *ax*. She says these are words, too. He says even if they are, there is something mean and petty about using them.

Now the Grouch is angry because Old Mother keeps freezing all the food he likes. He brings home a nice smoked ham and wants a couple of slices for lunch but it is too late – she has already frozen it.

"It's hard as a rock," he says. "And you don't have to freeze it anyway. It's already smoked."

Then, since everything else he wants to eat is also frozen, he thinks he will at least have some of the chocolate ice cream he bought for her the day before. But it's gone. She has eaten it all.

"Is that what you did last night?" he asks. "You stayed up late eating ice cream?"

He is close to the truth, but not entirely correct.

Old Mother cooks dinner for friends of theirs. After the friends have gone home, she tells the Grouch the meal was a failure: the salad dressing had too much salt in it, the chicken was overdone and tasteless, the cherries hard, etc.

She expects him to contradict her, but instead he listens carefully and adds that the noodles, also, were "somehow wrong."

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She says, "I'm not a very good cook."

She expects him to assure her that she is, but instead he says, "You should be. Anybody can be a good cook."

Old Mother sits dejected on a stool in the kitchen.

"I just want to teach you something about the rice pot," says the Grouch, by way of introduction, as he stands at the sink with his back to her.

But she does not like this. She does not wish to be his student.

One night Old Mother cooks him a dish of polenta. He remarks that it has spread on the plate like a cow patty. He tastes it and says that it tastes better than it looks. On another night she makes him a brown rice casserole. The Grouch says this does not look very good either. He covers it in salt and pepper, then eats some of it and says it also tastes better than it looks. Not much better, though.

"Since I met you," says the Grouch, "I have eaten more beans than I ever ate in my life. Potatoes and beans. Every night there is nothing but beans, potatoes, and rice."

Old Mother knows this is not strictly true.

"What did you eat before you knew me?" she asks.

"Nothing," says the Grouch. "I ate nothing."

Old Mother likes all chicken parts, including the liver and heart, and the Grouch likes the breasts only. Old Mother likes the skin on and the Grouch likes it off. Old Mother prefers vegetables and bland food. The Grouch prefers meat and strong spices. Old Mother prefers to eat her food slowly and brings it hot to the table. The Grouch prefers to eat quickly and burns his mouth.

"You don't cook the foods I like," the Grouch tells her sometimes.

"You ought to like the foods I cook," she answers.

"Spoil me. Give me what I want, not what you think I should have," he tells her.

That's an idea, thinks Old Mother.

Old Mother wants direct answers from the Grouch. But when she asks, "Are you hungry?" he answers, "It's seven o'clock." And when she asks, "Are you tired?" he answers, "It's ten o'clock." And when she insists, and asks again, "But are you tired?" he says, "I've had a long day."

Old Mother likes two blankets at night, on a cold night, and the

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Grouch is more comfortable with three. Old Mother thinks the Grouch should be comfortable with two. The Grouch, on the other hand, says, "I think you like to be cold."

Old Mother does not mind running out of supplies and often forgets to shop. The Grouch likes to have more than they need of everything, especially toilet paper and coffee.

On a stormy night the Grouch worries about his cat, shut outdoors by Old Mother.

"Worry about me," says Old Mother.

Old Mother will not have the Grouch's cat in the house at night because it wakes her up scratching at the bedroom door or yowling outside it. If they let it into the bedroom, it rakes up the carpet. If she complains about the cat, he takes offense: he feels she is really complaining about him.

Friends say they will come to visit, and then they do not come. Out of disappointment, the Grouch and Old Mother lose their tempers and quarrel.

On another day, friends say they will come to visit, and this time the Grouch tells Old Mother he will not be home when they come: they are not friends of his.

A phone call comes from a friend of hers he does not like.

"It's for you, *angel*," he says, leaving the receiver on the kitchen counter.

Old Mother and the Grouch have quarrelled over friends, the West Coast, the telephone, dinner, what time to go to bed, what time to get up, travel plans, her parents, his work, her work, and his cat, among other subjects. They have not quarrelled, so far, over special sale items, acquisitions for the house, natural landscapes, wild animals, and several other subjects.

A woman dressed all in red is jumping up and down in a tantrum. It is Old Mother, who cannot handle frustration.

If Old Mother talks to a friend out of his earshot, the Grouch thinks she must be saying unkind things about him. He is not right: often, by the time he appears glowering in the doorway, she has gone on to other

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topics.

One day in June, the Grouch and Old Mother take all their potted plants out onto the deck for the summer. The next week, the Grouch brings them all back in and sets them on the living room floor. Old Mother does not understand what he is doing and is prepared to object, but they have quarrelled and are not speaking to each other, so she can only watch him in silence.

The Grouch is more interested in money than Old Mother and more careful about how he spends it. He reads sale ads and will not buy anything unless it is marked down. "You're not very good with money," he says. She would like to deny it but she can't. She buys a book, secondhand, called "How to Live Within Your Income."

They spend a good deal of time one day drawing up a list of what each of them will do in their household. For instance, she will make their dinner but he will make his own lunch. By the time they are finished, it is time for lunch and Old Mother is hungry. The Grouch has taken some care over a tuna fish salad for himself. Old Mother says it looks good and asks him if she can share it. Annoyed, he points out that now, contrary to the agreement, he has made *their* lunch.

Old Mother could only have wanted a man of the highest ideals but now finds she can't live up to them; the Grouch could only have wanted the best sort of woman, but she is not the best sort of woman.

Old Mother thinks her temper may improve if she drinks more water. When her temper remains bad, she begins taking a daily walk and eating more fresh fruit.

Old Mother reads an article which says: If one of you is in a bad mood the other should stay out of her way and be as kind as possible until the bad mood passes.

But when she proposes this to the Grouch, he refuses to consider it. He does not trust her: she will claim to be in a bad mood when she is not, and then require him to be kind to her.

Old Mother decides she will dress up as a witch on Halloween, since she is often decribed as a witch by the Grouch. She owns a pointed black hat, and now she buys more items to make up her costume. She thinks the Grouch will be amused, but he asks her please to remove the

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rubber nose from the living room.

The Grouch is exasperated. Old Mother has been criticizing him again. He says to her, "You should have married a man who didn't drink or smoke. And who also had no hands or feet. Or arms or legs."

The Grouch is exasperated again. Again, Old Mother has been criticizing him. This time he says, "If I changed that, you'd only find something else to criticize. And if I changed that, then something else would be wrong."

Old Mother tells the Grouch she feels ill. She thinks she may soon have to go into the bathroom and be sick. They have been quarrelling, and so the Grouch says nothing. He goes into the bathroom, however, and washes the toilet bowl, then brings a small red towel and lays it on the foot of the bed where she is resting.

Weeks later, Old Mother tells the Grouch that one of the kindest things he ever did for her was to wash the toilet bowl before she was sick. She thinks he will be touched, but instead, he is insulted.

"Can't you agree with me about anything?" asks the Grouch.

Old Mother has to admit it: she almost always disagrees with him. Even if she agrees with most of what he is saying, there will be some small part of it she disagrees with.

When she does agree with him, she suspects her own motives: she may agree with him only so that at some future time she will be able to remind him that she does sometimes agree with him.

Old Mother has her favorite armchair, and the Grouch has his. Sometimes, when the Grouch is not at home, Old Mother sits in his chair, and then she also picks up what he has been reading and reads it herself.

Old Mother is dissatisfied with the way they spend their evenings together and imagines other activities such as taking walks, writing letters, and seeing friends. She proposes these activities to the Grouch, but the Grouch becomes angry. He does not like her to organize anything in his life. Now the way they spend this particular evening is quarrelling over what she has said.

Both the Grouch and Old Mother want to make love, but he wants to make love before the movie, while she wants to make love either during it or after. She agrees to before, but then if before, wants the

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radio on. He prefers the television and asks her to take her glasses off. She agrees to the television, but prefers to lie with her back to it. Now he can't see it over her shoulder because she is lying on her side. She can't see it because she is facing him and her glasses are off. He asks her to move her shoulder.

Old Mother hears the footsteps of the Grouch in the lower hall as he leaves the living room on his way to bed. She looks around the bedroom to see what will bother him. She removes her feet from his pillow, stands up from his side of the bed, turns off a few lights, takes her slippers out of his way into the room, and shuts a dresser drawer. But she knows she has forgotten something. What he complains about first is the noise of the white mice running in their cage in the next room, and then the wrinkled sheets.

"Maybe I could help with that," says Old Mother sincerely as they are driving in the car, but after what she did the night before she knows he will not want to think of her as a helpful person. The Grouch only snorts.

Old Mother shares a small triumph with the Grouch, hoping he will congratulate her. He remarks that some day she will not bother to feel proud of that sort of thing.

"I slept like a log," he says in the morning. "What about you?"

Well, most of the night was fine, she explains, but toward morning she slept lightly, trying to keep still in a position that did not hurt her neck. She was trying to keep still so as not to bother him, she adds. Now he is angry.

"How did you sleep?" she asks him on another morning as he comes downstairs late.

"Not very well," he answers. "I was awake around 1:30. You were still up."

"No, I wasn't still up at 1:30," she says.

"12:30, then."

"You were very restless," says the Grouch on yet another morning. "You kept tossing and turning."

"Don't accuse me," says Old Mother.

"I'm not accusing you, I'm just stating the facts. You were very restless."

"All right: the reason I was restless was that you were snoring."

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Now the Grouch is angry. "I don't snore."

Old Mother is lying on the bathroom floor reading, her head on a small stack of towels and a pillow, a bath towel covering her, because she has not been able to sleep and doesn't want to distrub the Grouch. She falls asleep there on the bathroom floor, goes back to bed, wakes again, returns to the bathroom, and continues to read. Finally the Grouch, having woken up because she was gone, comes to the door and offers her some earplugs.

The Grouch wants to listen to Fischer-Dieskau singing, accompanied by Brendel at the piano, but to his annoyance he finds that Fischer-Dieskau accompanied by Brendel is also accompanied by Old Mother humming, and he asks her to stop.

Old Mother makes an unpleasant remark about one of their lamps.

The Grouch is sure Old Mother is insulting him. He tries to figure out what she is saying about him, but can't, and so remains silent.

The Grouch is on his way out with heavy boxes in his arms when Old Mother thinks of something else she wants to say.

"Hurry up, I'm holding these," says the Grouch.

Old Mother does not like to hurry when she has something to say. "Put them down for a minute," she tells him.

The Grouch does not like to be delayed or told what to do. "Just hurry up," he says.

In the middle of an argument, the Grouch often looks at Old Mother in disbelief which is either real or feigned: "Wait a minute," he says. "Wait just a minute."

Well into an argument, Old Mother often begins to cry in frustration. Though her frustation and her tears are genuine she also hopes the Grouch will be moved to pity. The Grouch is never moved to pity, only further exasperated, saying, "Now you start snivelling."

The Grouch often arrives home asking such questions as:

"What is this thing? Are you throwing coffee grounds under this bush? Did you mean to leave the car doors unlocked? Do you know why the garage door is open? What is all that water doing on the lawn? Is there a reason all the lights in the house are on? Why was the hose unscrewed?"

Or he comes downstairs and asks:

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"Who broke this? Where are all the bathmats? Is your sewing machine working? When did this happen? Did you see the stain on the kitchen ceiling? Why is there a sponge on the piano?"

Old Mother says, "Don't always criticize me."

The Grouch says, "I'm not criticizing you. I just want certain information."

They often disagree about who is to blame: if he is hurt by her, it is possible that she was harsh in what she said; but it is also possible that her intentions were good and he was too sensitive in his reaction.

For instance, the Grouch may be unusually sensitive to the possibility that a woman is ordering him around. But this is hard to decide, because Old Mother is a woman who tends to order people around.

Old Mother is excited because she has a plan to improve her German. She tells the Grouch she is going to listen to Advanced German tapes while she is out driving in the car.

"That sounds depressing," says the Grouch.

The Grouch is cross about his own work when he comes home and therefore cross with her. He snaps at her: "I can't do everything at once."

She is offended and becomes angry. She demands an apology, wanting him to be sincere and affectionate.

He apologizes, but because he is still cross, he is not sincere and affectionate.

She becomes angrier.

Now he complains: "When I'm upset, you get even more upset."

"I'm going to put on some music," says the Grouch.

Old Mother is immediately nervous.

"Put on something easy," she says.

"I know that whatever I put on, you won't like it," he says.

"Just don't put on Messiaen," she says. "I'm too tired for Messiaen."

The Grouch comes into the living room to apologize for what he has said. Then he feels he must explain why he said it, though Old Mother already knows. But as he explains at some length, what he says makes him angry all over again, and he says one or two more things that provoke her, and they begin arguing again.

Now and then Old Mother wonders just why she and the Grouch have such trouble getting along. Perhaps, given her failures of tact, she

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needed a man with more confidence. Certainly, at the same time, given his extreme sensitivity, he needed a gentler woman.

They receive many Chinese fortunes. The Grouch finds it correct that her mentality is "alert, practical and analytical," especially concerning his faults. He finds it correct that "The great fault in women is to desire to be like men," but it has not been true, so far, most of the time anyway, that "Someone you care about seeks reconciliation" or that "she always gets what she wants through her charm and personality."

Certainly the Grouch wanted a strong-willed woman, but not one quite as strong-willed as Old Mother.

The Grouch puts on some music. Old Mother starts crying. It is a Haydn piano sonata. He thought she would like it. But when he put it on and smiled at her, she started crying.

Now they are having an argument about Charpentier and Lully: he says he no longer plays Charpentier motets when she is at home because he knows she does not like them.

She says he still plays Lully.

He says it's the Charpentier motets she doesn't like.

She says it's the whole period she doesn't like.

Now she has put her stamps in his stamp box, thinking to be helpful. But the stamps are of many different denominations and have stuck together in the damp weather. They argue about the stamps, and then go on to argue about the argument. She wants to prove he was unfair to her, since her intentions were good. He wants to prove she was not really thinking of him. But because they cannot agree on the sequence in which certain remarks were made, neither one can convince the other.

The Grouch needs attention, but Old Mother pays attention mainly to herself. She needs attention too, of course, and the Grouch would be happy to pay attention to her if the circumstances were different. He will not pay her much attention if she pays him almost none at all.

Old Mother is in the bathroom for an inordinately long time. When she comes out, the Grouch asks her if she is upset with him. This time, however, she was only picking raspberry seeds out of her teeth.

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DOROTHEA STRAUS

Remembering Jerzy Kosinski

There is a certain street corner, a sidewalk café, a special table with a particular view on the Quay Voltaire in Paris that, just as a monument commemorates a patriot, brings back to me the Polish writer, Jerzy Kosinski. Paris is divided in two by the Seine, and as you sit at the Café Quay Voltaire, in front of you, across the river, you look at the Right Bank: the dignified government buildings, the Louvre in the formal paths of the Tulieries Gardens and beyond, the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli. This elegant cityscape is haunted by the shades of the *bel epoque*, the *nouveaux riches* on display in their grand equipages or strolling among the geometric flower beds in the park, the ladies in long rustling skirts carrying parasols, the gentlemen, high-hatted, in swallowtail coats.

At your back, that maze of streets is the Left Bank, where you might fancy that the priest, whose cassock sweeps the dusty cobblestones, has stepped out of the Middle Ages. Here the ancient houses huddle, shabby and somber, mourning for their aristocratic tenants beheaded in the Revolution. A peoples' market, frequented by students and artists, permeates the atmosphere with the odors of vegetables and fruits. Adjacent to the café, there is a small hotel, where Oscar Wilde languished in inquisitorial banishment. I have seen no guest going in or out, and the filigree balconies resemble the inscriptions on a headstone. To your right, the flow of the Seine leads you towards the sturdy twin towers of Notre Dame, joining the two continents of Paris more surely than the spans of its many bridges. But if you draw close to the Cathedral, its bastion contours are obscured in a welter of stone gargoyles – all manner of supernatural shapes that seem to be saying: Right Bank, Left Bank, are one – and evil lurks in cities, the creations of man.

On a fair spring afternoon in the 1960s, my husband and I were resting at the Café Quay Voltaire from one of those long, aimless, irresistible rambles. I was content to sit indefinitely at the white-clothed table just watching the pedestrians pass by. Suddenly, the crowd seemed to go into slow motion and a single figure emerged, highlighted. When this stranger stopped at our table, I felt no surprise; the encounter had happened before – perhaps, in another existence – it was a *déjà vu* in the city of *déjà vus*. Where had I seen that swarthy face, with its hawk-like nose, the crest of hair, luxuriant and glossy as a raven's plumage springing

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from the low, broad forehead, the heavy black eyebrows, the small pointed ears, that body, thin as a razor blade, moving gracefully, lightly, as though in defiance of gravity? Was he the embodiment of a folk tale: a mischievous demon who stole the souls of pure village maidens and tweaked the noses of pious scholars bowing over their religious tomes?

He said only, "How nice to see you. May I sit down?" His accent was faintly foreign, his words, staccato, issuing like ice pellets from his narrow lips.

My husband had known him in New York City, and now Jerzy Kosinski told us that he was about to return there for the publication of his first novel, *The Painted Bird*. The conversation that afternoon was unremarkable, but when he fixed his glance on me, with his black, wide-set eyes, and commented, "I like your witch's hat," it was as though he were admitting me into a charmed circle. Although I had no idea, then or now, what this occult order might be, I conserved the black leather hat until it fell apart, its tall crown collapsed, its brim grown shapeless and frayed.

As soon as it was issued, I read *The Painted Bird*, and, for all the time I knew him, Kosinski was defined by this book. It recounts the experience of an eight-year-old boy, let loose, alone, in the forest, fleeing the Nazis. The child comes from a wealthy, upper middle class home, privileged with books, toys, a nanny, and cultured parents, but from the first pages he is presented as a wild Gypsy, whose dramatic dark coloring makes him easy prey for his blonde, Nordic predators. The narrative tells of his wanderings and his miraculous escapes during the war years. He seeks asylum in huts and farms and, everywhere, he is exposed to murder, rape, sadism, sodomy, incest, and the spells of half-human peasant crones. The small protagnoist is wily, agile, and resourceful; he has the courage of those unacquainted with self-pity. A sprite, he manages to survive,and terror rends him as strong as an army of one. He is oddly detached from the suffering of human beings; his pity is, chiefly, for animals who accept their hideous fates with dumb stoicism. The death of a single cart horse brings tears to the reader's eyes, while the corpses of men and women are cause for nausea and shock. Armed with his "comet," a type of lantern used as seeing eye, stove, body warmer, and amulet, the boy lives, at intervals, in the woods. In winter he glides over the ice with the help of a handmade contraption, part skates, part sail. He binds himself in rags against the cold. In summer, he feels close to the small creatures of the forest and somehow manages to evade the fangs of the wolves. His rapport with nature is spontaneous, unpoetical, difficult to explain in a pampered city child – but it is never doubted. Magic has its own reasons, unsuspected by the rationale of the psychologist. At the close of the

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book, at the war's end, the boy is befriended, temporarily adopted by a unit of Russian occupation soldiers, but the dark-painted bird is still isolated from the flock.

The Painted Bird is unique in the literature of the Holocaust, arousing shudders more than empathy – Hell is not to be depicted in humanistic terms. Of course, the tiresome cliché arises: is it autobiography or fiction? *The Painted Bird* is as fantastic as the grotesques in a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, painfully real as cautery.

This work and a second novel, *Steps*, made Jerzy Kosinski a celebrity. He could be seen at New York City's literary gatherings, still outstanding, as though his fellow writers and acquaintances had cut a swath around him. Urbane, impeccable, he wore smartly tailored, made-to-order suits, pinched here, flared there, to accentuate his swaggering grace. Although his height was average, his glossy black head, with waves of hair clustering around his pointed ears, and his swarthy sardonic face seemed to top the company. He was difficult to know, and just as a performer is concealed by his roles, Kosinski was elusive through many guises and his tall tales of pursuit, international espionage, and torture. By turn, he had been impoverished, homeless – or rich, with an apartment in every city of Europe, complete with a duplicate wardrobe so that he could take off free of baggage at a moment's notice. He played polo and skied with the jet set; hobnobbed, disguised as a professor, with academics in secluded quadrangles; he wandered, alone, at dawn, through slum streets and along dock-sides festering with vice.

He described to me several versions of his whirlwind courtship of the young widow of a millionaire Pittsburgh industrialist. The contact had been made soon after Kosinski, a penniless émigre, had arrived from Russia; through his right-wing books on economics written under the pseudonym Joseph Novak. The marriage was of short duration.

"We were an ill-matched pair," he had mused. Yet when she died, he mourned, and during her final illness, though divorced, he recalled that he lay on the floor outside her hospital room "like a dog."

Was he grieving for the pretty, blonde woman and her untimely death, or for her fortune, gained and lost? Perhaps both, and for a long time he treasured her memory.

Jerzy Kosinski, Katherina (Kiki) von Fraunhover (later to be his second wife), Carlos and Sylvia Fuentes, my husband and I were on holiday in Venice, an unreal city, a lovely bubble, unsubstantial, amnesiac, a beachcomber's paradise. Bedecked in decay, it is drowning, slowly, in the polluted waters of its canals. On this visit I was to share my vision with friends native to different parts of the old world (Carlos and Sylvia to Mexico City, Kiki to Germany, Kosinski to Poland). Perhaps, through

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them, at home in many places, I might solidify my view of Venice. When I explored churches, museums, palazzi, or crossed the expanse, great as a lake, of the Piazza San Marco with Carlos, I had a cicerone who was, at once, an habitué and an erudite, curious foreigner. As for Jerzy Kosinski, he seemed to belong here, everywhere and nowhere.

On our last evening in Venice, we dined at the Cipriani Hotel where Carlos and Sylvia were staying. Distanced only by meters of water from the main island, it was an opposite world, with neither romance nor a past. A cheerful, luxurious, manicured resort, it had resisted the infection of art and decomposition situated nearby. The swimming pools, tennis courts, and flower gardens were well-tended, related to their own type in very country. In the sumptuous dining room, one rich international course followed the next, each dish covered with a shining silver dome. We ate and drank heartily. Only Jerzy was abstemious, barely wetting his thin lips on his champagne glass and nibbling on a sliver of toast with smoked salmon. He required scant ordinary nourishment; his electric vitality was fed by some other unknown source. That night his discourse was sharp, abrasive, provocative, the ice-pellet words freezing even the brilliant conversation of Carlos, who observed Kosinski with the attentiveness of the novelist always on the lookout for material that might, someday, be utilized for his works. Fuentes is very much of this earth, but just as an avowed scientist also may be attuned to the unproven dimension of the metaphysical, this writer often dips his pen into the ink of the surreal.

On the dock, Kiki, Jerzy, my husband and I said goodbye to Carlos and Sylvia, promising to have a reunion soon, and we boarded the *vaporetto* for the brief return transit. Kosinski reclined among the pillows on the deck, but he did not relax, his body was an arrow ready to spring from a taut bow.

"The night has just begun for us," he said. "We usually hire a gondola at this hour to explore the back *callies*. Along the way we pick up prostitutes here, sailors there, and they join us aboard. We amuse ourselves in various ways."

I pictured this *Walpurgisnacht* orgy; Kiki, Amazonian and practical, bent to her master's will. Now we were approaching Venice, its domes and towers rising abruptly out of the water. In the flickering light on the *vaporetto*, Kosinski's face had a compelling, eerie beauty like a Satanic mask, worn by an eighteenth-century reveler at a ball in a Renaissance *palazzo*. When we disembarked, Jerzy and Kiki moved off in one direction, we in another. For no apparent reason, I looked back just as Kosinski and his companion were disappearing through the door of their hotel. The floating brothel – had it been only invented for our benefit,

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another tale to shock the bourgeoisie?

Through the years, it seemed to me that Kosinski's oral sagas were altering, the Gypsy being replaced by the Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. But in my view, he remained a loner, affiliated with no group, without any shared history, descended from his own book, *The Painted Bird*, unindebted to what is generally called the factual.

Now, he often acted as chairman, fundraiser and orator for charitable events. He was effective as president of International PEN and on behalf of Amnesty International; many a political prisoner might thank him for his freedom. Furthering Eastern European literature in America became a mission, and just as once a dedicated socialist evoked the name of Karl Marx, Kosinski called upon Bruno Schulz, the late Polish author and victim of the Nazis. One evening, from my place in an auditorium, I observed Kosinski on the podium, behind a microphone, delivering a money-raising speech for liberated Czechoslovakia. His voice was rasping, weaker, the words less staccato, but he appeared as stylish as ever. Yet like a nimbus over his shoulder I saw a different figure: a Polish schoolboy, wearing an old-fashioned visored cap and an adult's overcoat several sizes too large for him – from a pre-Holocaust photographic image caught by Roman Vishnyac's camera. Images of the ghetto population still unaware of its approaching fate, they break our hearts, and from our safe niche in place and time, we want to scream to warn the innocents. The vision of the schoolboy faded, and the renowned author stood alone on the stage.

I read in *The New York Times* the account of Jerzy Kosinski's macabre suicide. He was found dead lying in his bathtub, his head bound inside a plastic shopping bag, his chosen implement for suffocation. I visualized his dark face showing through the transparent material; and it brought to mind the creations of the artist Christo; the bridges of the Seine wrapped in plastic shrouds, while the stone gargoyles on the Cathedral of Notre Dame survey the scene mutely. It was a shock to learn, later, that this way of taking one's life was not a final demonic gesture on the part of Jerzy Kosinski but the method recommended by the Hemlock Society. What had triggered his death? I remembered being told by a survivor that the burden of Holocaust memories never grows lighter and may, at any moment, become too heavy to endure. That arrogant presence who trod the ground so lightly, was he the product of his own tricks and my fancy? Did I, as a Jew, wish to invest one of my own kind with supernatural invincibility? During all those years had I overlooked a human being? In any case, I am certain that Jerzy Kosinski would have scorned compassion. I hasten to reread *The Painted Bird*.

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GEORGE CURETON

My Ghetto: A Backward Glance

They call it a ghetto now, my old neighborhood in Newark. Ironically, it acquired that name only after the predominantly Jewish population moved out shortly after World War II. But when I was growing up, it was still a mostly Jewish community. My mother, like many of the Negro women, worked as a domestic in a Jewish home. I, like many of my black classmates, wore hand-me-downs from a well-to-do Jewish family.

Things were changing, though. When the war ended, many of my Jewish neighbors moved to the other side of Newark, to the Weequahic section, the part of town that Philip Roth writes about in *Portnoy's Complaint*. And my part of town became known as a ghetto.

I remember asking Mrs. Goldberg, my fifth-grade teacher, what the word "ghetto" meant. She gave me that enthusiastic look that told me I was in for a long drawn-out response. "Wait and see me after school," she replied, "and I'll tell you all about the word." Oh no, I thought, whatever the word means it must be something bad. I wasn't ready for that. I tried to get her to postpone her definition, but she was eagerly insistent: "No, you wait after school." None of my pleading had the slightest effect; I was to wait after school and see her. And all because of some mysterious word that white folks used to characterize my section of town. (If they needed a word with sociological implications, why didn't they ask us? We could have given them a more colorful term than "ghetto" to identify where the black folks lived. I can understand how the people in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* felt when they were denied the name of Doctor Street.)

So I stayed after school. Mrs. Goldberg began her definition at 3:20. She was still going at 4:00, when the janitor informed her that he had to clean her room, a signal for her to leave. But before she did so, she had me look up "ghetto" in my school dictionary. And it wasn't there. Nor did most of what Mrs. Goldberg told me mean very much to me. (After all its psychological and sociological ramifications had been explained, I came away with just one thought: How easy it was to rhyme the word with Moe, Joe and Steptoe, nicknames of some of my friends and classmates.)

But the ghetto was on its way. As the Jewish families moved away,

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the Negro families moved into their apartments. I wanted to move where my friend Mikey, son of my mother's employer, had lived. Mikey's mother, Mrs. Cohen, told my mother she would put in a good word for us to the landlord. We were nice Negroes, she would tell him, and her Mikey and I had played together through the years. She didn't have to tell him we were clean; he could see how immaculate my mother had always kept Mrs. Cohen's house.

I had always wanted to go through Mikey's apartment, but I was allowed only to peer into the kitchen from the corridor, a corridor always graced with the ethnic smells that Sam Levinson wrote about. Now these corridors would be acquiring a new ethnic fragrance. The smells of kosher cooking would be replaced by those of pork chops, chitterlings and other soulful odors, many of them redolent of pork in one form or another. (Had "The Three Little Pigs" ever been read in that building?)

We moved in. You know, I think Mrs. Cohen wanted Mom to take her old apartment so that she could drop in to reminisce. After all, it was her first home and the place where her children were born. Just the same, I didn't know why she would want to cling to memories of that old place; where she was going was luxury in comparison to what she was leaving. But to us blacks, what she was leaving was luxury.

Mrs. Cohen's husband also seemed to have a fondness for the apartment, for he would stop by whenever he was in the building to collect insurance premiums from the tenants. We soon found out that his visits weren't just nostalgia. He knew that the walls were paper-thin, and he could talk with Mom and at the same time listen for clients who made it a practice not to be home when he was around. After a few visits, we caught on; after that we would signal his clients by tapping on the pipes when he appeared.

We had not only taken over Mrs. Cohen's apartment, we had taken over her furniture as well. I'm sure that Mrs. Cohen felt she was showing her love and appreciation for Mom by leaving the furniture, and I'm sure that Mom appreciated it. Deep down, however, I know she would have preferred to buy her own – but that was out of the question.

So Mom thanked Mrs. Cohen and promised to keep the rooms just as they were. And whenever the word was out that Mrs. Cohen was in the neighborhood, we would break all records to get upstairs to reset the stage of memory. However, one day Mrs. Cohen was visiting us when new linoleum was delivered. Would you believe that she was upset because we were replacing the old, worn-out linoleum she had left? "Vera," she admonished Mom, "why are you changing the color of the linoleum in the kitchen? You could have asked me and I would have told you where I bought it. Then you could have gotten more just like

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it." Mom replied cautiously. She still worked for Mrs. Cohen and didn't want to risk offending her. "I'm sorry," she said. "Mr. Brausten, where you got it, is dead, and the shop is now a storefront church." She didn't add that she had never liked the color of the old linoleum and was overjoyed finally to have a color she wanted.

By 1947, the entire neighborhood had become black, except for a few families, and most of their children took the bus every morning to schools in the Weequahic section. But not all the Jewish kids left our school. One who stayed behind was Morris. He told us he didn't transfer across town because he was a "schlemiel."

I wonder if perhaps that was also the reason why Doris and her sister handn't transferred. Doris's mother dressed like a character from "Fiddler on the Roof," and she spoke a confusing kind of English. She didn't let her two girls out of her sight except to go to school. How Doris managed to get pregnant was a mystery, but she did manage it; the father was an unnamed black dude in the neighborhood. When the baby was born, nobody was allowed to see it; it was always wrapped from head to toe and tightly clutched in its grandmother's arms. We knew it was a boy, however, because whenever Doris and her sister got into one of their heated arguments about the baby – and this happened almost every day – it was a boy's name that they tossed about.

He wasn't the only black with Jewish overtones. Our family not only inherited Mrs. Cohen's apartment and her furniture, we also inherited a Jewish mother. My mother had worked for Mrs. Cohen so long that she had become a complete replica of her. She used Mrs. Cohen's Yiddish idioms to describe our behavior, and she pushed education at us as if it were a mission. I spent my early years being compared to Mikey, and was constantly harassed by my mother to be a doctor. One of Mom's greatest thrills came when I got my bachelor's degree and she could inform Mrs. Cohen that her boy Georgie had "graduated college" and would be teaching in Newark. Her ego was further inflated when I was chosen as New Jersey's Teacher of the Year. Showing *Look* magazine to Mrs. Cohen and pointing out my picture was one of the great highlights in her life.

So much of the Jewish culture was brought into our home that when everyone was talking about the Holocaust, Mom would retell the stories she had heard in the Jewish homes to my aunt, and we children would have nightmares. Izzy the fisherman, who had arrived from Poland, also told me gruesome stories. I had to know more; I think I read every book published on the concentration camps. I got involved personally. How would I have reacted under those conditions? Would black folks have gone to concentration camps without resisting, as I had

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read that Jews had done? Mom couldn't answer the question. She did remark, though, that in the South, when Negroes were being lynched, the other Negroes didn't put up much of a fight. I still couldn't see, though, how people, knowing that they were going to be killed, wouldn't fight for their lives. Only when Izzy told me about the Warsaw Ghetto did I begin to understand.

Before the exodus to Weequahic, the Jewish holidays were exciting times in our neighborhood. Everyone acted as if a storm were coming and he had to stock up before it arrived. As the deadline approached, things became even more hectic. "Georgie," Mr. Gold, the grocer, would yell, "Georgie, tell your mother to hurry and get her shopping done because I'll be closing before sundown." Mr. Gold closed earlier than the other shopkeepers because he had already moved to Weequahic. Mr. Gold was originally from New York, and he thought himself above the Newark Jews, whom he treated like yokels. His wife, who was my first-grade teacher, had inherited the store from her father, and he had condescended to run it. He rarely spoke to the other merchants. As Willie, the vegetable store owner, told me, "Gold thinks he's better than I am."

This feeling extended to us, as well. Mr. Gold's son turned up in a summer school lecture class I attended; he told me his father mentioned the Curetons with affection, but the nearest Mr. Gold could come to this was to tell me that he understood I could get along pretty well with Macbeth, which his son could not. He couln't bring himself to say that I must be a pretty smart young fellow; that just wasn't in his makeup.

The Jewish religion fascinated us. During the holidays, we would peer into the synagogue, watch the men and boys with their little round hats, and listen to the strange – to us – chanting. If we were chased away, we'd run upstairs to the back porch and watch from there. I always searched for Mikey among the sea of little black hats; he would be sending signals to his friend Bernie, telling him to meet him after sundown.

If we were curious about the Jewish religion, the Jews had every right to be just as curious about ours. If their chanting seemed strange to us, how did they feel about the vociferous "amens" they heard from our churches? The laugh of the neighborhood was the church above the liquor store. Every Monday, Jack, the store's owner, would find half his stock broken on the floor because of all the jumping that went on in the church Sunday night. It got so bad that Jack started packing up all the liquor on the shelves every Saturday night. Mom teased him about this. "Jack," she said one day, "I wonder if they're not adding a little extra shouting and leaping just to destroy the devil that's under them."

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Jack had thought about moving but he knew that Spruce Street, where the store was located, was the main street for business in our section of town, so he stayed and put up with the problem.

We boys all knew whose parents did domestic work; the evidence was visible in the clothes we wore. I begged Mom to bleach out "Bradley Beach" from my T-shirt, because I didn't want my classmates making jokes about my visit to Bradley Beach, where the Jewish kids in the neighborhood went to summer camp. It was a standing joke among the boys as to which camp they would "go to" the coming summer.

Knowing that I would get Mikey's hand-me-downs, I tried to get him to choose clothes he thought I would like. His mother would shake her head at his choice of colors. Though he didn't say it, I'm sure she told him that only blacks wore colors like that. When we were playing, I would tell him to take off his shoes because I didn't want them all scuffed and scratched when they came to me. He'd just laugh. I sometimes wonder how he felt, seeing his last-year's school clothes as my this-year's school clothes. (I might add that after Mom got through fixing them up they looked better on me than they had on him.)

The two worst high school football teams in Newark were South Side High and Weequahic High. The South Side team was made up of Jews and Negroes. Weequahic's ethnicity was made clear in its cheer:

> "Ikey, Mikey, Jake and Sam,
> We're the boys who eat no ham!
> We play football, we play soccer,
> We eat matzahs in our locker!
> Aye, Aye, Aye, Weequahic High!"

Whenever either team beat the other, it was considered a successful season by the victor. Many of the players on the South Side team had cousins on the Weequahic team, so for bragging rights each team played its hardest to win.

South Side High was known by the other schools in Newark as the school with the niggers and the Jews. Not only did we get beaten on the football field, our opponents also wanted to beat us after the game. We had to run for our lives after every game. We joked often about the Negro-Jewish makeup of our team. Teams with a few blacks or Jews did very well, but when the team was all Jewish, or half-Jewish and half-Negro – disaster. Weequahic's problem seemed to be that all their biggest boys were playing in the band. Ours was that nearly all our good players were ineligible because of poor grades. I guess football just wasn't our sport – or so the coach seemed to imply when he told us to go out and "lose with dignity."

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My senior year in high school was the most socially active period I had ever known. It also nearly led to trouble for years to come, as it did for many of my classmates, who happily joined clubs that later turned out to be Communist fronts.

"American Youth for Democracy" was one of the more exciting groups. The food at its parties was plentiful, the girls were pretty, and the cars its members drove were luxurious. I was invited to one of its parties by a friend, who later wished he had taken my advice and not signed his name to the guest list. I had been alerted not to get too involved by Mose, an old man in the neighborhood who told all the young Negro boys that we would live to regret ever getting mixed up with those white folks. He'd talked to my mother, too, and she had warned me about going off with "that gang." I was torn: I was eighteen; I did whatever I wanted to. But this time I gave in and stopped going with the crowd.

Some of my friends didn't. Some of them forgot that we were, as we used to say, "colored." One young man got so involved with one of the girls that he wanted to marry her. When her parents sent her away, he flipped his wig. To this day he hasn't completely found himself.

During the McCarthy era, my friends' membership in these "liberal" groups came home to roost. Many were unable to get jobs in teaching or government. I had felt somewhat ashamed at not having signed my real name at any of the parties: now I saw that I had, at least, saved myself a lot of trouble. In any case, I hadn't wholly approved of what went on there. I was always a little squeamish about white girls kissing black guys and playing around in dark corners.

Were the groups really Communist? I remember one day when we were sitting out in front of our building, a car pulled up at the Borkins' store. Two men got out. They called for Mr. Borkin. Mrs. Borkin started screaming at them, calling them fascists, so they took her, too. Her daughter was crying and trying to hold on to her mother. I later learned that the Borkins belonged to a Communist group; it was the daughter who did the recruiting for the parties and picnics we studs frequented on weekends.

That's all in the past. Willie the vegetable man, who now drives a taxi, stopped me in the street one day recently. "Cureton, Cureton," he yelled, and ran over and hugged me. He is a defeated man. He lost his Sara some years ago to some man with money; his son Larry is in India. As he put it, he has only the past to comfort him in his old age. He told me that he longed for the old days. "Not me," I said. "Remember, we were poor." He laughed, trying to point out to me the safety of the neighborhood at that time. He showed me the scars he had acquired from young punks trying to mug him. He was saved from death once by

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recognizing one member of a group as being the son of a kid who grew up with me. "Kid, aren't you a Kettle?" he asked him. The kid, realizing that Willie knew his father, let him go. Willie told me how proud he was of me, and he wished me continued success. He had tears in his eyes as he went back to his taxi.

They call it a ghetto now, that neighborhood. It's scarcely recognizable. Houses that once sheltered first generations from Europe and from the South are now mere shells. The grammar school that greeted all the new arrivals to Newark is gone. The synagogue where I watched for Mikey in his little black hat is now a Baptist church. My high school has a new name that reflects the black pride of the sixties. But when I went back there to address the students, I begged their indulgence to call it South Side High. They consented, realizing that the old black man was living in the past. Perhaps. But, as my mother would have said, "They should have such a past!"

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BOOKS

What Is a Good Society?

THE GOOD SOCIETY. By Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00.

CULTURE WARS. THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE AMERICA. By James Davison Hunter. Basic Books. $25.00.

THE CYNICAL SOCIETY. THE CULTURE OF POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN EVERYDAY LIFE. By Jeffrey C. Goldfarb. The University of Chicago Press. $22.50.

ACTS OF COMPASSION. CARING FOR OTHERS AND HELPING OURSELVES. By Robert Wuthnow. Princeton University Press. $24.95.

"CONTENTLESS CONSENSUS: THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF A SEGMENTED SOCIETY." By Richard Madsen. In **AMERICA AT CENTURY'S END. Edited by Alan Wolfe.** University of California Press. $35.00.

When Tocqueville visited America in 1835, he was amazed at how much Americans participated in the public life of their nation. He marveled at the spectacle of their energetic activity and enthusiasm for the *res publica*. When an American was "reduced" to caring only about his private affairs, an immense and depressing void took over his life. Tocqueville concluded that the "genius" of American democracy lay in the ability of the American citizen to be as interested in the common good as in his personal affairs. He termed this "self-interest rightly understood." In contrast to a sleepy Europe, the dynamism of American society fired Tocqueville's imagination. While Europeans were still mired in egotistical individualism, barely interested in their governments, Americans were busily talking about public affairs, reading a plethora of newspapers; even *women* were attending public meetings! Tocqueville remarked that conversation with an American always resembled a public forum: "An American does not know how to converse, but he knows how to debate. He does not chat with you; instead he harangues you. He always talks to you as though he were talking to a convention."

One sign of a healthy society, for Tocqueville, was vital public discourse about the common good. But this raises several important issues for contemporary American society. First of all, the state of public discourse today. That we are no longer reading – and that there no longer

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exists – the wealth of excellent newspapers that Tocqueville admired when he visited America is a fact. But is it also a fact, as some would argue, that we are fundamentally unable to engage in a meaningful national debate about the common good because the citizens of our nation speak a babel of antithetical moral languages? Second, the state of the concept of the common good – is the idea of the common good still meaningful and vital? Have philosophers of "liberal individualism" and advocates of multiculturalism persuaded Americans that the very idea of the common good does not apply to a society as individualistic and as diverse as ours? For example, is Ronald Dworkin correct in arguing that each individual must be free to determine for himself or herself what the good life is? As Dworkin puts it, "Only a life in which I pursue goals that I have freely chosen can be a genuinely good life for me, and only in leading such a life can I be truly happy." Similarly, John Rawls maintains that the good is founded in individual choice, that we must be free to choose for ourselves and free to pursue whatever good we prefer. He reasons that, since we are all individuals, different things will be good for different people.

Multiculturalists take a different path to reach a similar conclusion. They argue that, in a nation as diverse and dynamic as ours, the concept of the common good is not a static one. They point to the fact that American society is a complex fabric of cultures and subcultures; and their "multi-ethnic dogma," as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. calls it, leads them to conclude that it is unrealistic to try to formulate or impose one inclusive notion of the common good. Neither the individualist position nor the multiculturalist position would permit us to judge, as we should, that certain visions of the "good" are socially and morally superior to others.

Thus, the question is whether we, as individuals, are simply engaged in multiple pursuits of multiple goods or whether we, as citizens of a nation, have a genuine commitment to our political community and value its preservation, realizing that it coheres around a consensus about certain fundamental values, such as justice, freedom, and equality, which constitute the public good.

It seems to me that the notion of the common good has always been very much a part of American society and institutions. Since our Revolution, we have believed that our nationhood is based on a political and moral commitment to our eighteenth-century institutions, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. And we have correctly assumed that embedded in these institutions and documents is a clear vision of the public good. Implicit in the various "truths" – concerning equality, individual rights and freedoms, and the pursuit of happiness – that appeared "self-evident" to the Founding Fathers was a very definite

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moral vision. It is true that the Founders achieved this consensus by purposefully ignoring the lack of agreement on the issue of slavery, and that in 1862 a new consensus had to be forged through war. But that does not diminish the original moral underpinnings of the American social contract, which has served us surprisingly well for two hundred years. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. points out, our republic embodies ideals that transcend ethnic, religious, and political lines. The Constitution, after all, is not an infinitely malleable document. The concepts contained in it can and should set certain limits on the debate about the common good. They can and should make certain notions of the common good repugnant to us and make others morally and socially desirable. It still is in the interest of American society, however diverse it may be, to agree upon the principles contained in the Constitution. And yet, the concept of the common good cannot be a static one: there must be a balance of continuity and change. Each generation must be free to recapture or reinterpret, in its own way, the values it finds meaningful in the nation's tradition.

However, several contemporary sociologists, who examine the state of American society today, would not necessarily agree. For them, the point is not to agree on the common good or to define it, but rather to create a "discursive environment" in which we can perpetually debate the concept of the common good, in which we can continually discuss the goals of our collective life. Robert Bellah and his coauthors Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven Tipton in their new book, *The Good Society*; James Davison Hunter in *Culture Wars*; Jeffrey Goldfarb in *The Cynical Society*; and Robert Wuthnow in *Acts of Compassion* all examine the condition of American society today, bringing to their analyses differing perspectives and focuses. Although they approach their subjects in a variety of ways, underlying all of their studies is the fundamental issue of public discourse and its corollary, the concept of the common good.

For Robert Bellah and his colleagues, public discourse about the common good is critical, because the obstacle between our political and social problems on the one hand and our finding solutions to them on the other is the fact that "our understanding of the ends of society is so flawed that we do not know what we want or need." Bellah *et al.* remind us that the eighteenth-century idea of a public did not signify just congeries of interest groups but rather a *discursive community* capable of thinking and talking about the common good. Similarly, for the Bellah team, it is crucial that there be talk, and specifically talk about the common good, for that is what creates a sense of common purpose and hence a sense of nationhood. In fact, the essence of a democracy for

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Bellah is citizens' responsibility not only for their own good but also for the common good. "Even a benevolent tyranny can permit us the former: only a genuine democracy can make possible the latter."

However, it is not necessary to reach a substantive consensus about the common good, for Bellah and his coauthors are convinced that there is no pattern of a good society that they or anyone can discern and then expect people to conform to. "It is central to our very notion of a good society that it is an open quest, actively involving all its members. As Dennis McCann has put it, *the common good is the pursuit of the good in common.*" Rather than a clear moral consensus about the common good, *public discourse* is the *sine qua non* of mutual understanding and of democracy.

In a sense, the title of their book says it all. Borrowing it from Walter Lippmann's classic text of 1937, *The Good Society*, Bellah and his coauthors look back to Lippmann for a vision of democracy as a shared struggle in the pursuit of the common good – an ideal, according to Lippmann, that is hampered if not contradicted by the individualistic doctrine of the private market economy. Bellah agrees that if America is to be a vital democracy it must be a community in which citizens share responsibility for the common good. He and his colleagues continually emphasize genuine democratic participation in the institutions of society and an ethical concern for the public welfare.

In interesting if vague chapters on American law, politics, education, and religion, they call for reform of all our institutions, stressing that reform should be in response to a new awareness of the common good. For example, in the chapter dealing with the law, they point out that the courts have attempted to deal with the interdependence of modern society primarily in two ways: by extending the notion of individual "rights" and by protecting people against threats posed by the actions of others. Bellah and his colleagues note that, when it comes to such complex moral and social questions as affirmative action and abortion, the "individualistic language" of rights has helped little in deepening discussion and in developing new conceptions of the common good. When these authors turn to education, they argue that schools must have a "solidary" concept of their mission; they should help a nation develop a sense of the common good, of social morale and public spirit as well as a "vivid memory" of the nation's cultural past. Education – however pluralist its forms – must not be for the sake of individual self-enhancement. As for economic institutions, it is not surprising that the authors would like to see them further the common good and not just the sum of individual goods.

Bellah and his coauthors never explicitly assert that talk rather than

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action is a sufficient solution to our social problems, but their concrete suggestions for social and political reform seem oddly tame, given the urgency of our social ills, and they also seem oddly procedural, emphasizing as they do public "discourse" and debate, as if the process of talking could itself remedy the situation. For example, their proposals include "making political parties better able to *articulate* meaningful national programs," "the creation of policy institutes, or think tanks, which would help parties *formulate* national platforms," "outlaw campaign advertising on radio and television," thereby encouraging candidates to "engage in substantive *debate*." They urge us not "to frame the abortion *debate* only in terms of rights" because this has the effect of "inhibiting realistic, morally engaged *debate* about the nature of abortion . . . The language of rights cuts off *debate*. . . . The courts respond to the adversaries in cases brought before them rather than framing a *debate* about what is best for the common good." Just as these authors' concept of the common good stresses the process of an open-ended quest rather than a consensus about the common good, their prose suggests that they similarly consider public discourse about our national problems not just the means to an end but an end in itself.

Other social scientists also pose this fundamental question of whether America is a vital discursive community, capable of reflecting about the public welfare and capable of conducting an open ongoing quest for the common good. But they are not all as optimistic as Bellah. In fact, one of his coauthors, Richard Madsen, seems more pessimistic about the possibility of meaningful discourse about the common good. In an article published in a different volume, he points out that in our society, each interest group seeks favorable attention from the state. However, not one of these groups would admit that it represents the particular interests of the few. Instead, groups claim that their own side represents the public good and that their opponent represents the private interests of the selfish and greedy. Since people with fundamentally different positions nevertheless assert the universal validity of the interests of their particular group (which they invariably term a "community" brought together by genuine moral aspirations and concern for the public good), Madsen concludes that "the language of American politics is so flexible as to be almost formless" and ultimately meaningless. The title of his essay, "Contentless Consensus," expresses his sense that we are not a discursive community capable of addressing the question of the common good. In today's society any notion of the common good is an empty one because it is based on the interests of the few and not of the many.

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James Hunter at first appears equally pessimistic. In his view, not only is there no consensus as to the common good, we cannot even search for it together because we speak antithetical moral languages. America, he argues, is so divided over fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, truth, the good, obligation to one another, and the nature of community, that the result is a veritable war waged over the national identity – over the meaning of America and over what comprises a good society. These polarizing impulses within America (in relation to issues such as abortion, gay rights, affirmative action, and funding for the arts) seem powerful enough to him to preclude any meaningful national debate – in fact there is an absolute impasse. As far as he is concerned, the compromise born out of public discussion and debate that makes politics in a democracy effective is unattainable. Like Madsen, Hunter concludes that the opposing communities have become "little more than competing interest groups. Without a common agreement about what is good or what is right, all that remain are the particularistic claims about what is good and what is right articulated by opposing factions. The question then becomes, 'Which particularism will reign?' "

And yet, despite the wealth of interesting evidence he presents to buttress his assertions of deep cultural divisions, Hunter recognizes the centrality of public discourse in a democracy and holds out the hope that we can somehow create a healthier "discursive environment." First of all, he concedes that most Americans occupy a vast middle ground between the polarizing extremes. Second, he believes that certain trends will inevitably mitigate polarizing positions, that extreme positions must eventually incorporate moderating elements and accommodate themselves to the times in order to survive. He remarks that progressive intellectuals have always succeeded in replacing the older cultural hegemony in part by assimilating the positions of traditional intellectuals. Antagonism has thus always been neutralized through compromise and moderation. As for orthodox and fundamentalist positions, he sees signs that they too are reconstructed or "resymbolized" in ways that are compatible with a secular and progressive public culture. In addition, he maintains that the knowledge sector has largely defined the rules for public argumentation and that the voices of orthodoxy have for the most part agreed to play by them. Every time a conservative Catholic priest relies exclusively on scientific evidence to demonstrate that the fetus is a living human being, the orthodox alliance tacitly submits to the linguistic domination of the progressive position. Although Hunter feels that public moral discourse in America is "shallow and fragmentary," he, like Bellah, sees talk – that is, genuine debate – as fundamental to the workings of the democratic state.

Underlying Hunter's assessment of deep national divisions, Madsen's

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diagnosis of a "contentless consensus," as well as Bellah's evocation of Lippmann's "Good Society," are irrepressible hopes for a discursive environment that includes and encourages citizens to participate in a national debate about our common goals. Bellah rejects the idea that different groups speak antithetical moral languages; he believes rather that we share a set of "overlapping cultural traditions." As we reinterpret and renegotiate these shared traditions, we discover that our society is still constituted by significantly shared meanings. But not all sociologists are so purposefully looking and hoping for reconciliation.

Jeffrey Goldfarb, for one, has little trouble choosing sides. Goldfarb believes that public discourse in America cannot be productive because it is essentially cynical: our leaders use rhetoric which neither they nor their constituents believe, but which both leaders and followers nonetheless use to justify their actions. And this cynicism we confuse with democratic deliberation. (Goldfarb, by the way, sets an astonishingly high standard for public discourse: to demonstrate "how far political discourse has declined," he compares contemporary media campaigns to *The Federalist,* which was originally published in New York newspapers.)

Goldfarb has an unusual solution to the problem of the breakdown in public discourse. In *The Cynical Society*, he attributes the decline in public discourse to the dominance of mass consumer culture which supposedly saps people's minds and thereby undermines democratic practice. But, he adds, whereas mass culture and mass media control individuals, there also exists an autonomous "high" culture within which individuals are free to exchange ideas and judgments among themselves. (He has interviewed no sapped minds, nor does he present evidence to prove any of his judgments.) He simply asserts that high culture – which enlightens citizens and saves them from the "manipulating powers of society" – must go hand in hand with democracy.

Goldfarb traces his preference for high culture as well as his contempt for "mass culture" to the eighteenth-century Federalists, who, he unflinchingly tells us, saw cultural excellence as protection from the dangers of democracy. Anti-Federalists, on the other hand, viewed popular participation not only as a key to good republican governance, but also as an educational enterprise necessary for the creation of a general republican virtue. Anti-Federalists believed that elitism prevented people from governing themselves. For the Anti-Federalists, the virtuous polity needed to be protected from the decadent "excellence" of aristocracy. Rejecting this sensible Anti-Federalist position (the only one suitable for a democracy), Goldfarb proudly makes what he calls a "neo-Federalist sort of argument" that is full of contradictions. He asserts that "cultural excellence" alone can "teach citizens to think for themselves about their soci-

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ety, so that they can act democratically." But when he defines this high culture as "open" and "pluralist," it is a most feeble attempt to resolve the problem of the exclusive and antidemocratic nature of high culture. Fortunately for his critics, he pleads guilty to their inevitable accusations: "Populists, both of the left and the right, will argue that my position is elitist." It is a memorable idea indeed to locate genuine democratic discourse within the confines of elitist high culture, thereby excluding from participation in the debate the two hundred million Americans who might watch television or attend baseball games. Tocqueville, by the way, believed that "high culture" could exist only in an aristocratic society. In a democracy, by contrast, the goal of public culture was to draw all citizens into the political process, to insure their political education in order to facilitate their participation in the nation's political life.

What I find especially unfortunate about Goldfarb's misguided solution to the problem of the "decline" in American public discourse is first, a failure to understand that, as far as democracy and high culture are concerned, one has nothing to do with the other. And second, a failure to understand the function of language. The purpose of language is to communicate. Simply put, language – especially "public discourse" and debate about the common good – must be open and accessible to all, educated and uneducated, rich and poor. Using language to exclude people – whether in the name of "cultural excellence" or protection from mass consumer society – is using it as a weapon. The goal of public discourse about democracy is to promote mutual understanding, not to deepen class divisions.

Talk in public and in private about the public good is one necessary condition for a "good society," a fundamental way to discover the bonds that unite us, our overlapping traditions, our ideas about what democracy and the common good mean. But there are also less intellectual and less verbal ways to arrive at mutual understanding. In his compelling study, *Acts of Compassion*, the sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that what can unite people who intellectually might not agree on a specific notion of the good may be *caring* rather than *talking*. Through caring about their fellow citizens, Americans act out rather than talk about the common good. Wuthnow's thesis is that most American citizens actively participate in a community that they define in terms of people caring for each other, that this type of community gives meaning to their lives and that they depend on it for their very identities. Robert Bellah also addressed this question of caring in society, but he diagnosed

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the state of caring in America in a less glowing light. In these difficult economic times, he fears that we care less than we used to about our fellow citizens. He sees Americans retreating from social responsibility as the national economy and their personal fortunes become more fragile: "As long as our income doubled every generation, we could afford to concern ourselves with those who had not yet come to share in the general affluence. Once that is no longer the case, we resent the use of public funds for common provision." But for Wuthnow, our altruism does not depend on economic expansion; we are instead a nation as caring as we are individualistic.

According to Wuthnow, eighty million Americans are engaged in some kind of voluntary caring activity. And, in one capacity or another, approximately forty-five percent of all Americans, age eighteen or over, are involved in volunteer work for churches, synagogues, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, health agencies, and so on. Wuthnow uses these statistics to refute the idea that American individualists are more committed to their personal gratification than to altruistic values. He found that, among the people he interviewed, those who were the most individualistic were also the most likely to value doing things to help others. We Americans, he concludes, cling tenaciously to our self-interest as individuals, and yet we are eminently willing to demonstrate compassion to our neighbors.

Although volunteerism appeals to the people he interviewed because it seems to be a human haven from the cold sea of bureaucracy around them, these volunteers, for the most part, limit their caring to institutionalized roles – they help at a senior citizens center one evening a week or participate in a Meals On Wheels program. Wuthnow hypothesizes that, by institutionalizing compassion through the role of the volunteer, people can express their altruistic impulses as well as retain their individualism. Volunteerism allows people to dispense caring in ways that do not conflict with their interests as individuals. For example, conservatives are more likely to be motivated by the feeling that one has debts to repay, whereas liberals attach value to self-improvement.

Interestingly, these people seem to be acting out Robert Bellah's aspiration of making institutions morally responsive and responsible. Bellah's agenda revolves around recapturing control of our institutions and using them in democratic and moral ways. His hope for institutions is contained in the words of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, who maintains that "the most profound decisions about justice are made not by individuals as such, but by individuals thinking within and on behalf of institutions."

Wuthnow admires those people whose central gratification comes from knowing that they are members of a group. In volunteer activities,

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Wuthnow discerns a series of relationships that demonstrates "our dependence on one another, creating a sense of common membership that at least tempers each individual's fiction of being a purely autonomous creature." "When I volunteer," one of his interviewees said, "I get a feeling of family. Some of my brightest memories as a child are when my community was in trouble, like when a tornado hit or when we got twenty-three inches of snow – when everybody comes out and joins together to help – those have left lasting memories for me of real togetherness and family. So the gathering together on a volunteer basis gives me some of that."

Although Wuthnow at first argues that individualism and altruism can and do coexist perfectly well, his agenda ultimately reflects a real communitarian ethos, for, like Lippmann and John Dewey, he believes that one's membership in a group is central to one's identity. "To be a member of something not only constitutes one's identity as an individual, it also constructs the identity of the group. You demonstrate that you subscribe in some small way to the value of the group by deciding to contribute to it. And it is, indeed, the group to which you are contributing – the group in its entirety, not just the particular individual to whom you happen to give a gift."

What Wuthnow is doing is studying more than volunteerism in America. The fundamental question he poses is really that of a moral philosopher, not a sociologist: "I want to know why compassion is an absolute value like beauty and truth." His book is likely to appeal to those who share his hopeful moral vision. His explicit goal, like that of Robert Bellah, is to offer a sense of what is a "good society," and he proposes that "compassion holds forth a vision of what a *good society* can be." Noting, as did James Hunter, the intense rancor between religious liberals and religious conservatives, he speculates that compassion might be the one thing they can agree about. Compassion bridges the barriers of ethnicity, race, social status, and perhaps ideology.

Bellah's vision for the future of American democracy is not at all dissimilar. From American Catholic and Protestant social teachings, he derives the lesson that justice means having institutions and people carrying out God's commandment to care for one another. He unambiguously states that the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself constitutes the foundation of any human community. "Justice begins with recognition of the need of all persons to take part in the life of a community in order to be fully human, by being united with one another in mutual activity and, finally, mutual love."

Bellah's goal is more than public discourse about the public good, for he aspires not just to communication but communion. Ultimately his

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vision is an almost mystical one that transcends politics, institutions, neighborhoods, nations, even human beings. Real solidarity for him includes all of nature and the universe: "When we care only about our own nation, we do not contribute much to a good world society. When we care only about human beings, we do not treat the natural world with the respect it deserves."

What distinguishes Bellah from other social theorists is his fundamental awareness of the sacred: "We are sometimes swept with a feeling of thankfulness, of grace, able to participate in a world that is both terrifying and exquisitely beautiful. At such moments we feel like celebrating the joy and mystery we participate in. Religions at their best help us focus that urge to celebrate so that it will include all the meanings we can encompass. The impulse toward larger meaning, thankfulness, and celebration has to have an institutional form, like all the other central organizing tendencies in our lives, so that we do not dissipate it in purely private sentiment." Bellah would like to see those "oceanic feelings" – the sort that define a purely religious experience of the sacred – incorporated into our civic lives and our society, a marriage of universal mystical feeling and civic and governmental institutions.

His vision, like that of Wuthnow, is beautiful and inspiring, and both their books merit serious attention. Bellah as well as Wuthnow remind us that we can include in our discussions of social and political problems an awareness of the mystery of the universe and of the importance of love and compassion. They ask us to consider not only what it means to be good citizens but also what it means to be fully human.

However, also worthy of attention are the risks inherent in introducing an emotion such as love into our concept of the common good or into our institutions. History provides ample evidence that even the most positive emotions, especially when they are collective emotions and when they are permitted to monopolize rational values, can be volatile, unstable elements that can easily transform themselves into their opposite. In addition, Bellah's universalization of love creates a kind of religion of man and nature, based on abstract notions of "humanity" and the "natural world," when an ethic of responsible citizenship may be a more effective and reasonable goal.

And yet, Bellah and his collaborators, along with Wuthnow, are right to assert that a modern society such as ours aspires to develop, along with democratic institutions and the legal protection of individual rights, a moral order that recognizes both the dignity of the individual and the mutual responsibility of citizens. Tocqueville too had believed that civic virtue ultimately leads us to transcend mere self-interest. Although his concept of "self-interest rightly understood" referred to the ability of the citizen to balance an interest in the common good and in

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his own personal good, Tocqueville hoped that citizens who were fully engaged in the polity would come to desire to transcend self-interest, so deeply would they feel responsibility and genuine commitment to the political community. He also noted that charity and compassion could not be relegated to religion or to private morality, for they had become a social duty, a political obligation, and part of public virtue. Indeed, political and social ethics have incorporated the basic elements of Judeo-Christian morality, and today we look to governments to rescue the weak and the suffering. True civic virtue may help us to rise to our better selves, to discover higher forms of behavior and deeper levels of ethical concern, and to act upon – not just to articulate – the common good.

SUSAN DUNN

Crossing the Border

VESTED INTERESTS: CROSS-DRESSING AND CULTURAL ANXIETY. By Marjorie Garber. Routledge $35.00.

Why is the transvestite now an object of admiration? Perhaps because he/she tries to transcend boundaries. In an age that shouts, "You can be whatever you want to be," such a figure has no small appeal. Marjorie Garber's provocative new book goes further, claiming that "there can be no culture without the transvestite, because the transvestite marks the entry into the Symbolic," which is, according to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the world of language, law and hierarchy. Although most readers will find this thesis difficult to accept, they will not have to cross that border to discover many treasures in the book. More than any other writer I can think of, Garber leaps adroitly from high culture to pop culture – from cross-dressing saints of the Middle Ages to Madonna, from the boy actors of the Shakespearean stage to Michael Jackson – and is equally engaging in both worlds. A partial mapping of the author's journey takes us from cross-dressing computer engineers and truck drivers to Harlem drag balls, *Tootsie* and *Yentl*, Peter Pan and *M. Butterfly*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and detective fiction, trouser roles in opera, gay identity, Hasty Pudding shows, Valentino, Elvis, Liberace, and "Geraldine," the French courtier, historian and ambassador Abbé de

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Choisy, T. E. Lawrence, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Little Red Riding Hood – not necessarily in this order but often in no more apparent one. Like the transvestite, or "tv," this produces both exhilaration and anxiety.

Vested Interests, as the book's witty title suggests, is in part about changing fashions, not only in clothing but in the social construction – and deconstruction – of gender. Freud said that we are all potentially bisexual; Garber shows that we can be bigendered as well. She suggests that transvestites belong to a third sex, the sex that represents more. It is the transvestite, she argues, who destabilizes the borders between gender and sexuality and who brings other categories into crisis as well, particularly those of race, class, and ethnicity. Now I can appreciate a man in a dress as well as the next person, but it seems to me that it is the author's delight in metaphor as a fusion of disparate elements that is sometimes driving her analysis. (Garber is a Renaissance scholar, professor of English, and Director of the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies at Harvard University.)

There is a tendency, says Garber, to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser. One problem here may be that she looks *at* the transvestite, and not *inside* him or her, at least not enough. For all her psychoanalytic underpinnings, Garber writes about transvestism as if it were primarily theater, entertainment. But there is no doubt a darker side here, whose borders she does not wish to transgress. In real life, the "tv," especially the male, is hardly a creative questioner of the binary status quo. He above all is imprisoned by the stereotypes of gender, trapped in what has been called "commodity fetishism," the makeup, wigs, and elaborate clothing that mark the most exaggerated aspects of so-called femininity, what Garber calls "artifactuality." The new psychoanalysis of women would no doubt recognize womb envy under his skirts, something that Garber does not consider.

She does mention briefly that the "tv" may be a fetishist; I would go further and call him a multiple one. And much more space might have been given to the idea that transvestism for both sexes is an attempt to regain the phallic mother of early fantasy. Rather than mark the entrance into the Symbolic, the "tv" may actually signal confinement in the mother-child dyad. Thus instead of representing more, as Garber claims, the "tv" may represent less, by harking back to a period before differentiation, to pre-Oedipal fusion with the mother, in classical psychoanalytic terms. Nonetheless, one fascinating aspect of Garber's critique of traditional psychoanalysis lies in her treatment of female fetishism, something which has been generally ignored. "Why is fixation on the penis (and by extension, the phallus) not called a fetish when it is

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attached to a man?" Perhaps because customarily the fetish has been a detachable – and artificial – part. Still, this is something to think about.

Garber has a long section on transsexuals, those who reconstruct their biology to accord with the gender they want to have, unlike transvestites, who retain their original biology but want to change their gender (at least some of the time). The author does not explain why male transsexuals would want to be women in a world dominated by men. This is of particular interest in the case of successful men such as travel writer James Morris (now Jan Morris) and the tennis champion and doctor Richard Raskin (now Renée Richards). Here again I think that Garber has looked more on the outside than the inside.

To sum up, Garber does not distinguish sufficiently between transvestism for amusement or social rebellion and transvestism for pathological reasons, including desires for omnipotence. Furthermore, her examples over time and space tend to sound like one big case study. It will be left to the historians to give all of her rich material a more specific context. However, because of her range and brilliance some of the problems in this (strikingly illustrated) book constitute its very fascination. Garber blurs all the usual boundaries, mixing past and present, high and low, black and white, East and West, as she travels back and forth seemingly effortlessly among different genres of literature, entertainment – and life. Her very form puts categories into question, as she claims the transvestite does.

However, a major problem with her theory that "there can be no culture without the tv" is that she never grapples (and how I wish she had) with the widely accepted converse that it is precisely the recognition of binaries, particularly those of sexual difference, that marks a child's entrance into language and culture. Furthermore, as Garber notes, one reason for the great appeal of transvestism today lies in its questioning of binary hegemonic structures and its suggestion that reality lies in representation alone. But Garber does not consider the political dangers of our postmodern adulation of marginal figures. Although one might argue that putting categories into crisis prevents totalitarianism from occurring, might not this destabilization lead to a new totalitarianism whereby no value judgments are allowed since everything is considered equal? I am thankful, however, that there is one boundary that she leaves intact, that between the cultivated and the noncultivated. Whatever one's disagreements or questions, this powerful, original, and imaginative book represents one of the strenuous achievements of culture. *Vive la différence.*

ELAINE HOFFMAN BARUCH

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The Triumph of the West

WAR BY OTHER MEANS: SOVIET POWER, WEST GERMAN RESISTANCE, AND THE BATTLE OF THE EUROMISSILES. By Jeffrey Herf. The Free Press. $27.95.

In 1975, the Soviet Union began to deploy the SS-20, a new intermediate-range missile capable of striking all of Western Europe. Its deployment was part of a policy intended to enhance Soviet influence in Western Europe by weakening the strategic link between Western Europe and the United States. Helmut Schmidt, the Social Democratic chancellor of West Germany, tried in vain to awaken President Carter and his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to the political significance of the SS-20s. In the fall of 1977 a frustrated Schmidt went public: in a speech at the Institute for Strategic Studies in London, he called attention to the political implications of the growing imbalance in intermediate-range nuclear weapons caused by the deployment of the new missiles. As a result, in December 1979, the leaders of NATO arrived at what came to be called the "two-track decision"; they would negotiate with the Soviets for the removal of the SS-20s while at the same time proceeding to deploy comparable weapons if the Soviets proved unwilling to negotiate. The effectiveness of the two-track decision depended on the plausibility of NATO's threat to deploy a new generation of intermediate-range weapons, the Pershing II and the cruise missiles, in Western Europe. From 1981 to 1983, a resurgent peace movement in Western Europe and the United States – a movement particularly strong in West Germany – led mass protests against the deployment of the new NATO weapons. Nevertheless, in November 1983 a coalition of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats in the German Bundestag voted to station the new weapons on German soil. After NATO proved able to act on its threat, the Soviets backed down. In 1987 the United States and the Soviet Union signed a treaty on intermediate-range nuclear forces that abolished medium-range missiles in both arsenals. The treaty was a victory for Western policy, and the failure of the Soviet initiative formed one of the many preconditions for the emergence of efforts at reform in the Soviet Union which led ultimately to the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War.

That, in a nutshell, is the story of the battle of the Euromissiles. In textbook accounts, and in the minds of most historians and political scientists, it will be a tale of international relations, related in terms of mili-

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tary balances, alliance politics, and the decisions of government elites. But that is only the shell of the story. It is the merit of this unusual book by Jeffrey Herf to examine the nut of the matter, the larger currents which led to the Bundestag's decision. In his telling, the battle of the Euromissiles was fought primarily in the political culture of West Germany, and his book focuses on the beliefs which motivated the actions of those West Germans who opposed the NATO decision and those who implemented it. One of his central concerns is the effect of intellectuals on the non-intellectual world, of their role as an interpreting class which influences politics by the slanting the public perception of events. His methodologically eclectic and innovative examination of the interaction of intellectual currents, political movements, public debate, and government policy should make this book useful to readers with no particular interest in the battle of the Euromissiles *per se*.

At the beginnning of the 1960s, there was a broad consensus in the political culture of West Germany that the central antithesis of the age was between liberal democracy and totalitarianism, a danger which had existed on the radical right and now came primarily from the radical left. Among the most articulate spokesmen of this view was Helmut Schmidt, the SPD leader who became chancellor in 1974, and who took the initiative leading to the NATO two-track decision. Yet as the time for stationing the NATO missiles approached, Schmidt discovered that he had lost the support of his own party. Much of Herf's book is devoted to explaining the inner transformation of the Social Democrats, which he attributes primarily to the culture and cohorts of the New Left within the Social Democratic Party.

Herf is interested less in the problem of why the German New Left arose – the answer to which must inevitably remain rather speculative – than in the more empirically verifiable question of how it achieved its influence. He makes innovative use of the results of universty student council elections to show how among Social Democratic students the antithetical opposition between democracy and communism was replaced by a "Popular Front" mentality which placed Social Democrats and Communists on the same side of the fundamental dividing line of politics, arrayed against a capitalist right. Herf uses demographic and institutional data to show that the radicalization of a significant minority of the student body in the humanities and social sciences (other than economics) combined with a rapid expansion of university faculties, and, in the early 1970s, with the tenuring of a politically radicalized cohort within educational and cultural institutions. In provinces governed by the SPD, whole new institutions devoted to "critical peace research" were founded, which reinterpreted anticommunism as a social psychological

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pathology of late capitalism. These intellectuals provided the conceptual lenses through which the NATO counter-mobilization was interpreted by the peace movement and by writers for the influential news magazines, *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*. As a result, the rank and file of the SPD increasingly embraced the peace movement's concern that it was not the Soviet Union but the United States which posed the greatest threat to West German security.

Yet, as Herf shows, using quantitative data on West German elite opinion, the radicalization of the SPD led a significant portion of the elites of the mass-media and universities to move from the center-left toward the center-right. He provides what may be the only account in English of the Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft, an organization of university professors who fought the institutionalization of radical students demands within the academy. The tendency of Social Democratic governments to acquiesce in the radicalization of the universities turned some liberal academics away from the SPD. The new leader of the Christian Democrats, Helmut Kohl, made an effort to reach out to German intellectuals alienated from the Social Democrats. In what became known as the *Tendenzwende*, intellectuals once identified with the Social Democratic left set forth their reasons for abandoning the party. Though an embattled minority of older Social Democats remained commmitted to anti-communism and Atlanticism, in the debate on the stationing of the Euromissiles it was primarily spokesmen for the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats who set forth the arguments against communism and the strategic necessity of countering the Soviet buildup. The intellectual and electoral swing from the SPD toward the CDU led to a German government, under Helmut Kohl, committed to stationing the NATO missiles.

Since the publication of Herf's book, it has come to light that at the height of the anti-missile demonstrations Soviet negotiators repeatedly urged their NATO counterparts to acquiesce to Soviet demands, arguing that the peace movement would make it impossible for NATO to deploy its weapons. The success of NATO in countering the Soviet buildup of intermediate-range missiles came as a surprise to Soviet leaders. As Herf suggests, the Western victory in the dispute over the Euromissiles marked a defeat for the old-style thinking of the Brezhnev era, and helped to set the stage for the "new thinking" under Gorbachev. The rest, as they say, is history.

The speed with which the Cold War ended has been exceeded by the speed with which its memory has disappeared from the political culture of Western intellectuals. The role of the Western response in the crackup of the Soviet empire has yet to be adequately analyzed. *War by*

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Other Means provides a suggestive model of how that analysis might proceed. Its deft use of qualitative and quantitative data, and its combination of narrative with analysis, are exemplary in showing how the history of international relations can be be enriched by the study of political culture.

JERRY Z. MULLER

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- *Democracy!* Act II by Joseph Brodsky
- Fiction by Doris Lessing
- Cynthia Ozick on Henry James
- An Interview with Julia Kristeva
- Robert Alter: Benjamin, Kafka, Proust
- Richard Pipes on Intellectuals and Anti-Americanism
- Leonard Kriegel: *Gender and Its Discontents*
- C. Vann Woodward on the University

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

I am a great admirer of Cynthia Ozick, whether in her novels or in her essays, and of her unambivalent attitude about being Jewish in the post-Holocaust era. Two years ago, I invited her to be on a panel with Günter Grass, and she refused, saying: "I will never be on a panel with a German." When I suggested that Grass is a different German, as he always talks about German responsibility for Auschwitz, she retorted, "He likes to talk about Auschwitz because it deals with dead Jews."

I was, therefore, very surprised at the vagueness and ambiguity in her essay "Of Christian Heroism" (*PR* 1, 1992). While her skepticism and analytic objectivity can be deduced from her statement "How I want to assent to his [Paldiel's] thesis," and although she obviously does not assent, her essay will no doubt be misunderstood. I am afraid that her skepticism will be negated by the title "Of Christian Heroism" or by the inclusion of this essay as an introduction to the book titled *Rescuers. Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust.*

How is it then that, if she cannot accept Paldiel's view of the righteous persons, she presents herself in such a vague, un-Ozick-like way? In her essay "Primo Levi's Suicide Note," she talks about Levi's being brought to the boiling point by a letter from a German who pleads with him to "remember the innumerable Germans who suffered in their struggle against inequity." She seems to agree with Levi who, in response to that letter, scorned "the apologists, the liars, the false repentants," but in her own essay, there is a feeling of hagiography when it comes to rescuers.

I personally do not think that Mordechai Paldiel, Director of the Department for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, is an objective observer. If he were, he wouldn't call Freud's theories "brainwashing." His position, however, is very important because we are faced here with the potential for distortion of history. Paldiel is like a gardener whose life depends on the number and the quality of the trees he takes care of. I know of only one of these trees, and it is rotten.

In my memoir, *The Lost Childhood*, I describe how the Germans on whose estate my sister and I worked in 1944-45 didn't know that we were Jews, as we had false papers claiming we were Polish Catholics. In 1962, a young German arrived in Tel Aviv at my sister's apartment and announced that he was Wolfgang, the little boy she had taken care of at the estate in Herzberg. His parents had told him so much about her that he had to meet her and see Israel. He stayed in Israel for six months, and he decided that because they had saved our lives, his parents were righteous Gentiles who should be inscribed at Yad Vashem. Wolfgang got my mother's and my sister's approval for the in-

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scription, and they wrote to me in New York.

I refused the endorsement, saying that Wolfgang's parents did not know we were Jews and that even if they suspected we were, they still did not deserve to be honored for not having had us killed. It is as if, as I wrote to Wolfgang, "a driver would be so honored for not running over someone although he could have done so with impunity. Our world has not yet sunk that low." Wolfgang's answer followed immediately. "Dear Yehuda: Who do you think you are? A six-foot tall Aryan? If not for my father, you would have been a heap of ashes in Auschwitz." He got his parents into Mr. Paldiel's garden without my vote in 1964.

I am writing all this because, in my opinion, Cynthia Ozick is probably the most important Jewish voice on the issue of the Holocaust, and she owes it to all of us to remain precise, definite, and to not give the world an option to misread her position.

Yehuda Nir, M.D.
New York, NY

Cynthia Ozick replies:

Yehuda Nir and I have talked on the telephone about my essay, and with considerable candor; I am glad he has decided to air his disappointment with me in writing. (The late Lucy Dawidowicz's advice about telling your ideas is that it ought to be done wholesale, not retail.) Yet I am not sure what Dr. Nir intends when he hugely inflates my putative "importance as a Jewish voice on the issue of the Holocaust," since I am certain he would agree that the only truly resonant voices are, like his own, those of the survivors and witnesses. Nor am I sure what Günter Grass has to do with the subject of Jews saved by Gentiles; in any event, Dr. Nir is using quotation marks imprecisely, choosing thereby to speak on my behalf on matters I have chosen not to examine in print. The point I was making (Dr. Nir has not succeeded in conveying it) was that those intellectuals – Jewish and Gentile, usually of the left – who occasionally weep in public about the German murders are crying crocodile tears if, at the same time, they express support for the PLO "cause," succinctly articulated in the ruthless Article 21 of the PLO charter, and never repudiated, even during the current negotiations. Mourning dead Jews is futile if you are backing those who are daily terrorizing living Jews.

But all that is entirely irrelevant to Dr. Nir's thesis, which, as I understand it, is that there were literally no Gentiles at all who can be said to have saved Jewish lives out of genuine altruism, humanity, or compassion – Yad Vashem's Avenue of Righteous Gentiles notwithstanding.

I recall how shocked I was on a visit to Denmark some years ago, when a group of Danish Jews drew me aside to whisper their similar skepticism. In the first place, they said, there were many more Danish Nazis than there were Danes in the Resistance; and in the second place,

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the much-honored boatmen who took the Danish Jews away to safety in Sweden demanded cash first, and a lot of it too, before they dipped an oar. Jews who could not afford the passage, had they not been subsidized by other escaping Jews, would have been left behind for the ovens. And looking over recent lists of Jews hidden by Gentiles, one is struck by a curious pattern; marriage and money. Is it an act of purest altruism to save one's Jewish husband, or one's Jewish sister-in-law? Is it an act of uncompromising compassion to sell life? Numbers of so-called rescuers were, like the Danish boatmen, responding not so much to pity as to pay. There is also the astonishing instance of the German countess who hid Jews on her parents' estate, apparently to spite her mother, whom she despised. Moreover, the psychology of spite continues into the present – offered a rescuer's medal by Jerusalem, the countess angrily spurns it, "I'm furious with Israel . . . I don't see that Israel has anything to do with my ideals." As an exemplar of sympathy with Jews, not to mention minimal esteem, the countess – even as rescuer – is, in attitude, not far behind her countrymen.

So Dr. Nir's general skepticism is unquestionably justified: no one has ever claimed that multitudes of Gentiles were clamoring to save Jews by reason of human decency alone, and undoubtedly the Wolfgangs, thriving and conniving, outnumbered the rare quiet altruists.

In our telephone conversation, Dr. Nir commented (and without a written record I will try to be scrupulous, eschewing quotation marks) that to his knowledge not a single Gentile was ever executed as a punishment for hiding a Jew. In other words, according to Dr. Nir (and using his measure), among the millions and millions of European Christians who were sentient beings from 1940 to 1945, there is not one who merits Jewish gratitude.

I will certainly not deny the Christian and/or humanist failure of all of Europe during those lethal years. Yes, I agree that Europe in the Nazi period made Sodom and Gomorrah look good. But an equal truth is this: no matter how proportionately few rescuers there were in relation to bystanders (and they were profoundly few), they are worthy of honor and homage. The fewer they were, the more worthy. And if in the whole of Europe, there were only as many honest saviors as you could count on your fingers, that handful would still be numbered among the righteous. I remind Dr. Nir that the cities of the plain were deservedly condemned because God, like Dr. Nir in Europe, could not find even ten righteous people there. The difference between God and Dr. Nir, however, is that God was at least willing to look.

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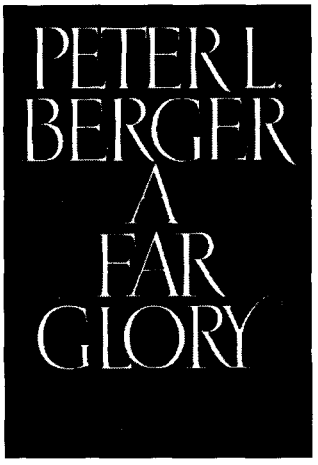

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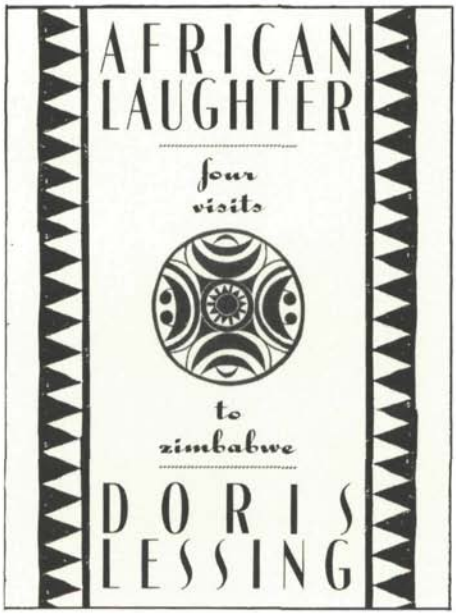

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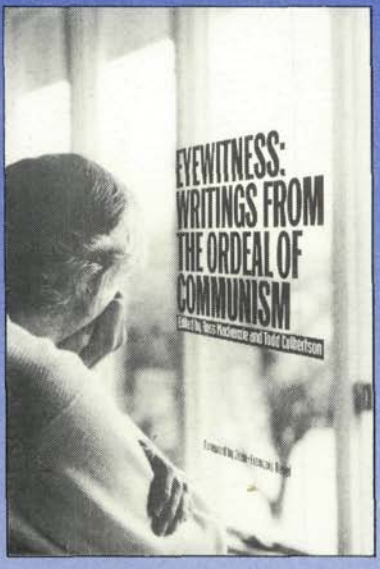

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